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APRIL 2005

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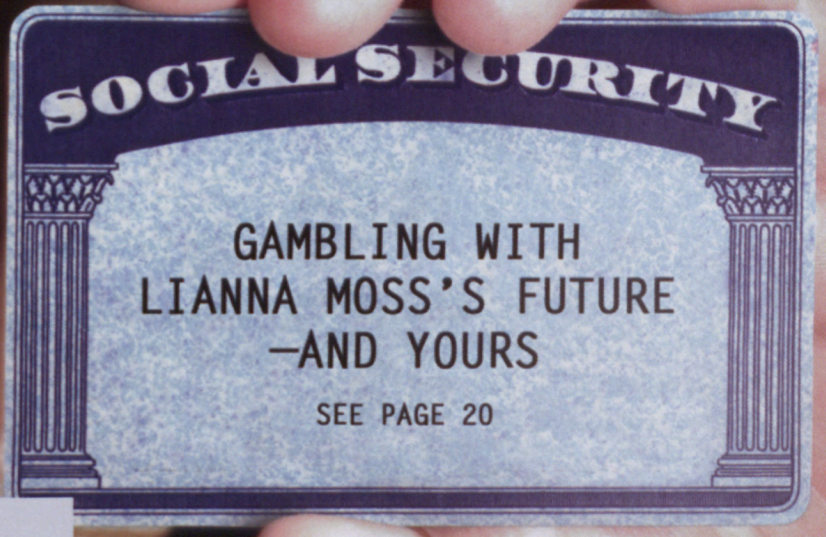
Risky Business



GAMBLING WITH LIANNA MOSS'S FUTURE —AND YOURS

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features

COVER 20 **Risky Business**

Social Security is under attack, and politicians in a growing number of states are chipping away at guaranteed pension plans, too. Is your retirement safe? Yes—but only if you're willing to fight for it. Don't let them gamble away your future.

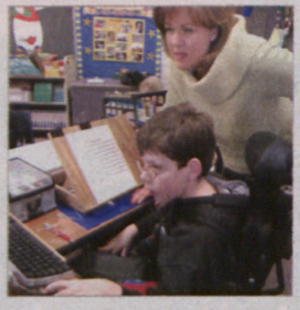

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PHOTO TOP: PETER ZUZGA; ILLUSTRATION LEFT: DAVID RIDLEY; IMAGES RIGHT FROM TOP: NATHAN HAM, IMAGES.COM, JAN KERSHAW, RACHELLE OMENSON
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Every day Sandra Sessoms-Penny faces a school of energetic students. Every day she faces their unending questions. Every day she faces eight hours that often feel like twenty. And every day she doesn't give up. Sure, she could be working in an office building, making more money, never getting hit in the head with a French fry at lunch. But Sandra is the kind of assistant principal who welcomes every aspect of her job. Because being one of the first female electricians in the U.S. Air Force and rising through the ranks to become Senior Master Sergeant taught her how to embrace a challenge. Or two.

DETERMINATION

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Second Act

When I was little, my friends and I spent hours in a secret closet in my house, fastidiously plotting our lives as grown-ups. Not surprisingly, our futures were always bright and full of fancy, but somehow they never involved much work. Doctor-lawyer-teacher-nurse—we were all that, yes. But then—in a snap—we were...retired! And off we were to foreign lands, big swimming pools, and a world teeming with hot dogs, caviar, and all the Twinkies we could eat. ¶ We've since had the ol' mid-life awakening, but I don't begrudge all that dreaming. There's something to be said for musing early about life's second act—what it might look like, how you might feel in it. Makes you plan, contemplate, work hard to ensure you end up with a nest egg that allows for a modicum of financial peace and, hopefully, a lot of joy. ¶ Unfortunately, despair is what a lot of folk, including educators, experience once they hang up their career hats. Faced with a bleak financial bottom line, many are forced to take ho-hum jobs to make ends meet, or simply resign themselves to a post-work life that bears no resemblance to the one they'd once imagined. ¶ That's why in this issue of *NEA Today* we take a close-up look at the current debate over retirement security. It may be the furthest thing from the minds of our younger members, but as the noise grows louder around President Bush's plan to privatize Social Security, everybody will—and should—find a reason get engaged. Few of us, after all, will work forever. Will your pension be enough to see you through your golden years? Will Social Security really be there for you? ¶ The debate now raging over these questions is no picnic, but *NEA Today's* John O'Neil sorts through the confusion, dispels some of the ever-burgeoning myths, tells what's at stake if Bush gets his wish, and offers tips for your own activism (page 20). It's all worth noting. Face it, second acts don't come but once. Shouldn't yours be as fanciful as they appear in your dreams?

PHOTO: JIM ARBOGAST

Marilyn Milloy

EDITOR MARILYN MILLOY

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Great Public Schools for Every Child

NEA's Persistence Pays Off

Republican and Democratic state legislators call for NCLB's overhaul.

When the so-called "No Child Left Behind" Act (NCLB) was signed into law, now more than three years ago, the applause was deafening.

Members of Congress, from both sides of the aisle, had worked with the White House. NCLB was signed a few months after 9/11, and everyone was fixated on the symbolism of the politicians putting aside their differences and uniting behind the law—rather than on the law's actual details.

NEA praised the law's goals—high expectations for every child and a highly qualified teacher in every classroom. These were goals we'd long advocated. But NEA refused to ignore the serious flaws in the law's all-important implementation. To do so would have been a dereliction of our duty to our nation's children and students, and to our members.

NCLB takes a one-size-fits-all approach to assessing student performance that we, as educators, know to be misguided. It's an approach that, ultimately, impedes rather than improves a child's education.

And then, as we saw the Department of Education rigorously enforce the new law, NEA looked for ways in which the law could be amended to accomplish the goals it purported to advance. We pointed out that NCLB, in fact, gave the Secretary of Education broad discretion to waive requirements of the law that were detrimental to children, teachers, and schools. While the Secretary has such discretion, we have seen minimal improvements.

We also noted that the law clearly stated that state and local governments should not have to incur expenses for implementing NCLB that are not funded by the federal government. But as the Administration and Congress failed, year after year, to provide the promised funding for NCLB's implementation, this is precisely what happened—local and state governments have been saddled with the costs of the law's unfunded mandates.

Needless to say, NEA's straight talk about NCLB did not endear us either to the Administration, its supporters, or to some of our staunchest friends in the Congress. But for us, this has never been about partisanship; it has always been about the children.

Much has changed, however, in recent years. Our vigil is no longer a lonely one. Many others have stepped forward and spoken out about NCLB's shortcomings. In fact, 46 organizations have joined with NEA in proposing specific changes to the law, including the Children's Defense Fund, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), and the National School Boards Association.

Most recently, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) issued a critique of the law and how it was being enforced that is one of the most thorough and telling yet.

The Republicans and Democrats on this Task Force found serious "methodological flaws" in the law's centerpiece—its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provisions—noting that schools must be evaluated by comparing "successive groups of students against a static, arbitrary standard, not by tracking the progress of the same group of students over time." And the state legislators recommended that the states be given greater flexibility in meeting the AYP objectives. What's more, they called for allowing multiple measures in evaluating student performance rather than relying exclusively on standardized tests.

> "Our vigil is no longer a lonely one. Many others have stepped forward and spoken out about NCLB's shortcomings."
> —REG WEAVER

PHOTO: MATT FERGUSON

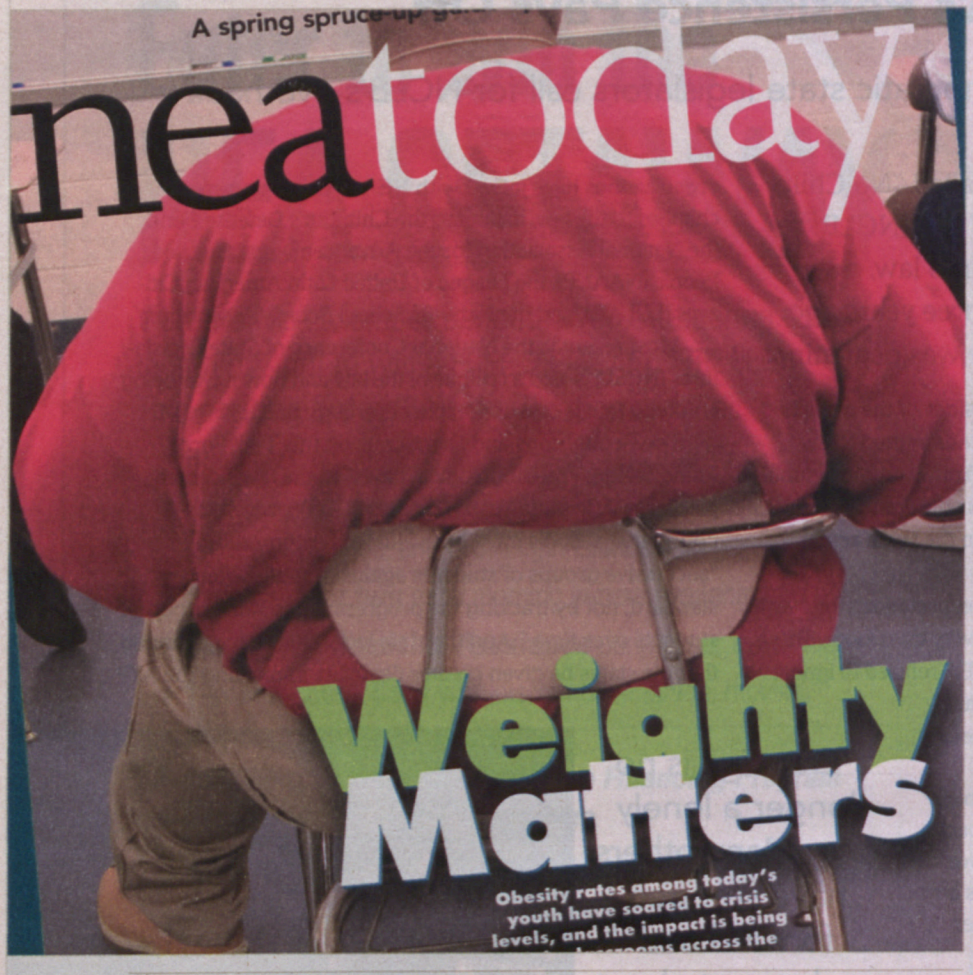
This, my friends, is music to our ears. To read NCLS' full report and recommendations, go to: www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/nclb_report.htm.

NCLB needs to be fixed and funded if it is to work. This should not be a test of your loyalty to the President or to your political affiliation. It should be about what's best for America's children, in all their glorious diversity.

It's been said that there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come—well, thanks in large part to Team NEA's efforts, fixing and funding NCLB's time is here. Now we and our allies have to run the final mile in this marathon. We know it won't be easy, but as educators, we also know the power of persistence.

Reg Weaver

NEA PRESIDENT REG WEAVER



PUTTING THE PHYSICAL BACK INTO EDUCATION

I read the article "Growing Pains" (cover story, March) with both interest and dismay. The statistics regarding the number of children who take part in physical education should frighten us all. I have read dozens of articles decrying the lack of physical education in schools but not one time has anyone advocated that all children in grades K–12 have daily physical education classes. Yes, the cost is substantial, but the cost of allowing our children to deteriorate further into ill health is astronomic. Schools can achieve quality physical education at all levels.

JOSEPH HERZOG
Fresno, California

The picture on the March cover certainly reflects what is happening to our nation's children. I teach family and consumer sciences classes and struggle daily to teach our students healthy food and fitness habits that can have a positive impact on their lives. But parents are a child's first teacher and need to be taught the skills to prepare healthy food choices and encourage children to be more physically active.

Thanks for publishing the alarming statistics. This is a wake-up call and we must do our part to combat childhood obesity.

KATHERINE CHIMINI
Stratford, Connecticut

Bravo for a fine, thought-provoking article on the subject of children and obesity. There is one unexplored reason for the weight gain among children—the introduction of bovine growth hormone into the nation's milk supply. I wish America's teachers would call for an independent investigative agency to study this.

MEDINI LONGWELL
Deland, Florida

Thank you for the outstanding cover story. As a health and P.E. chairperson I see firsthand the consequences of inactivity and poor diet, and how they interfere with student learning. Your article will hopefully bring to the forefront the crisis we are facing.

BRYAN T. SCHWAB
Oil City, Pennsylvania

UNDERPERFORMING STUDENTS

After reading John Mohl's article (Debate, March) I concluded he would prefer not to help students who enter his classroom performing below grade level. I get underperforming students all the time. I relish those students and treat them as a challenge. We are in this profession primarily for them—to make them better people while they are still young. If we love them and pay attention to them, we can help them succeed.

BELINDA McCORMICK
Yuma, Arizona

Jennifer Slifer's Debate response left me scratching my head. Am I to understand that retaining a student in eighth grade is bad for his self-esteem but putting him in a class with children at his reading level (third grade) is OK for his self-esteem?

GARRY L. PLOTTS
Mill City, Oregon

If you think retention damages self-esteem, how do you think children who can't keep up with their classmates feel? If a child is struggling, retention should be considered. But the critical factor is to do it early, the younger the better. If you wait until a child is an eighth-grader you have to overcome the emotional and psychological damage done by seven years of failure. Being "kept back" does not have to carry a stigma if approached in the right way.

JUDITH LORIMER
Pepperell, Massachusetts

DESIGN VS. DARWIN

I am a Christian who feels like I'm being swept under the rug (Rights Watch, March). Surveys show that the mass public believes in a higher power of some kind yet we can't even mention that a higher power may exist. I'm concerned about the union's strong opposition to anything other than Darwin's theory. We want our students to think for themselves and not just accept what we tell them in school. Isn't that our goal as educators?

JIM CHRONISTER
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

I find it fascinating that Michael D. Simpson's tremendously biased article fits into the "Rights Watch" section of *NEA Today*. Obviously he would argue that presenting the Intelligent Design theory to students violates their rights. Did he consider including comments from the creationist point of view in his article? Presenting all theories on creation would allow our students to be independent thinkers who have the right to make their own decisions about what they believe.

JOANNE MURPHY
Long Beach, California

SEEING RED

It was good to see your article "Seeing Red?" (UpFront, March). Years ago I decided that red ink felt like an assault on my senses and chose a yellow marker as an alternative. Now, as I walk around my classroom, I highlight any "fix its" I see on my students' papers. This gives them a chance to make changes and they can see through the marks.

NANCY MAYNARD
Covina, California

MOVING BEYOND CARROTS

I would like to respond to "No More Carrots" (Last Bell, March). Whether a "reward" is tangible or not, we all do things because we benefit from them. It is unfortunate, though, that learning has come to this. I have yet to meet a student who did an assignment for the sake of learning. Students complete assignments because they are graded, and in the student's mind the grade is the end. If they truly were interested in learning, they would study and think about the material daily. I think teachers, administrators, board members, and parents need to learn this lesson as well before we can expect students to understand it.

JOHN LUVERA
Coupeville, Washington

FINDING TIME

We are examining our school day and trying to find more time for teacher collaboration and were quite intrigued by the statistics cited in "Time Out?" in the February *NEA Today* (UpFront). Is there some way I could get a copy of the study?

SUE BRADNER
Sumner, Washington

Editor's Note: The statistics in the article originally appeared in *Education at a Glance 2004*, an annual report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, a grouping of most of the world's developed nations, including the United States. You can read highlights from the report online at www.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/55/33714494.pdf.

"We are in this profession primarily for [underperforming students]—to make them better people while they are still young. If we love them and pay attention to them, we can help them succeed." —BELINDA McCORMICK

LET'S TALK

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upfront

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Budget Blues

More testing, less money. That seems to be the basic idea behind the Bush Administration's proposed education budget. The spotlight this year is on high schools, but what's the plan? Two more years of mandatory standardized testing—but $358 million less for high schools.

Altogether, the President's budget calls for a $530 million cut in federal school funding. The budget would eliminate funding for 48 education programs including $1.3 billion in federal vocational and technical education and $437 million for Safe and Drug-Free Schools state grants.

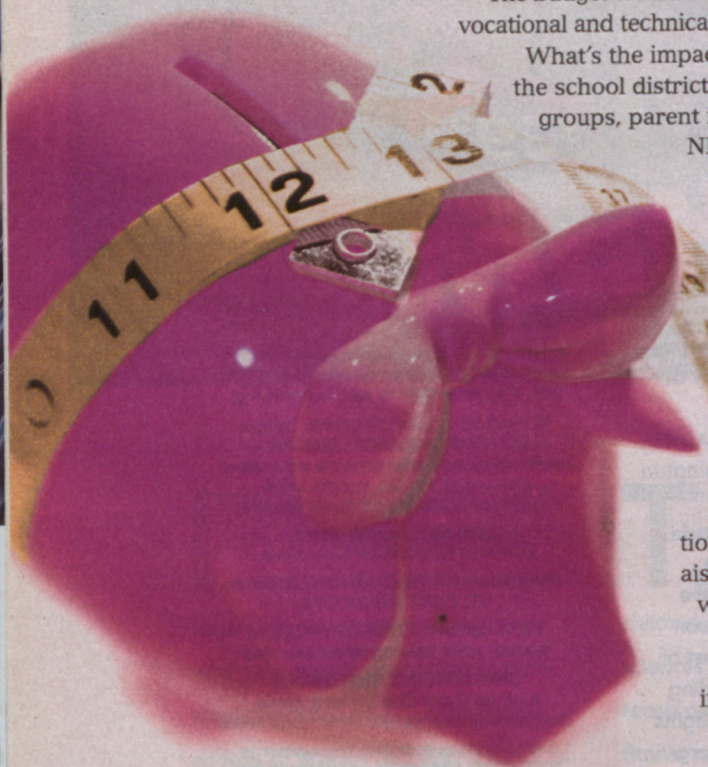
What's the impact? In Fairfax County, Virginia, the federal dollars pay for virtually all of the school district's efforts to turn children away from drugs, including student anti-drug groups, parent information nights, and safe after-graduation activities, according to NEA member Clarence Jones, who runs the program. Says Jones, "When you increase anti-drug spending, drug use goes down. When you reduce the money, drug use goes up."

MORE BUDGET PROPOSALS THAT ARE BAD FOR KIDS:

- **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION** state grants would be frozen, even though the number of non-English-speaking immigrants is soaring.
- **TITLE I GRANTS** that help schools hire more teachers and paraeducators to educate low-income children would see a giant shortfall—they'd be less than 60 percent of the amount Congress authorized.
- **IDEA STATE GRANTS** for educating children with disabilities would be only three-quarters of the currently authorized level.

This isn't the first time the Administration has low-balled its education budget. Friends of public education in Congress—on both sides of the aisle—have restored some of the most damaging cuts in the past, and NEA will ask them to help again.

You can join in the chorus. NEA members live in every state and almost every congressional district. Go to www.nea.org/lac for more information about the budget and how to contact your federal legislators.



By the time they are 14 years old, 32 percent of young women and 52 percent of young men consume three or more softdrinks a day, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

PHOTO TOP: COMSTOCK IMAGES; PHOTO BOTTOM: GROFF CREATIVE

Learning, Millionaire-Style

Is it a game show? Is it a class? At Don Estridge High Tech Middle School in Boca Raton, Florida, it can be both. The school may lack the dramatic music and lighting of *Who Wants To Be a Millionaire*, but it uses essentially the same technique for polling the audience—and that can boost learning, says sixth-grade math teacher Juanita Rodriguez.

BEFORE CLASS, she enters questions she plans to ask students. When that part of the lesson comes around, her students work out the answer and press a button at their desks instead of raising their hands.

In moments, the results are tabulated and the class can see who has answered and what percentage answered correctly. The equipment was donated by Texas-based eInstruction Corp.

As products of the digital age, the "clicker kids" easily adjusted to the new technology, Rodriguez reports. And it makes them more active learners.

The company says 1,000,000 of its "response pads" are in use at thousands of schools in all 50 states.

At Don Estridge, says Rodriguez, "This system has drastically improved my students' test scores. My class told me that having so much fun is what keeps them focused."

—DANIEL MOISE

NOT JUST ANOTHER Gutter Ball

What's the fastest-growing sport on high school campuses? Get ready to break out your polyester shirt and tacky shoes because it's...bowling!

During the 2003–04 school year, bowling showed the greatest increase in the number of schools offering the sport, with 291 new schools, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations. Boys bowled on teams at 1,477 schools, while girls played at 1,467. A total of 33,848 students hit the lanes.

All told, nearly 7 million students played a high school sport last year—an all-time high.

Traditional sports still dominate the field: Football remains the most popular sport among boys, with about a million participants, while basketball tops the list for female athletes, with nearly half a million girls shooting hoops. But nontraditional sports such as bowling, along with rodeo and snowboarding (which also made the survey), are giving students more ways to stay fit and have fun.

PHOTO TOP: MEDIOIMAGES; PHOTO BOTTOM: JESSICA WEDVICK

Notepad

Mindful Teaching

Your head is spinning as you juggle teaching the kids, planning a spectacular science lab demo, and calming an upset parent. Do the demands of educating children sometimes make you think you're losing it?

A new study by researchers at University Hospitals of Cleveland and Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine should ease your mind.

The August issue of *Neurology* reported that those who have intellectually stimulating careers—like teaching—are actually less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease down the road.

Researchers examined subjects with different occupational histories and used data from the U.S. Department of Labor to rate each occupation on the mental, physical, social, and fine motor skills required. About 12 percent of the study subjects were educators, says Dr. Kathleen Smyth, the lead researcher.

This study did not explain why mentally challenging jobs were linked to lower incidences of Alzheimer's, says Smyth, but apparently, "It pays to keep your brain active."

For more on keeping mentally sharp, see page 42.

—LISA FELIPE

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Better Schools, Smaller Prisons

To curb spiraling prison costs, put more resources into schools. That's a message state budget-makers may soon hear more often. Two-thirds of state prison inmates lack a high school diploma, the Bureau of Justice Statistics has found. And there's hard evidence that quality education, as early as preschool, can keep people out of jail. One long-term study showed $15,000 spent on preschool yielded a $260,000 return to society, mostly because the children were much less likely to get in trouble with the law when they grew up. And the anti-crime effects of good schools are not limited to tiny tikes, research shows.

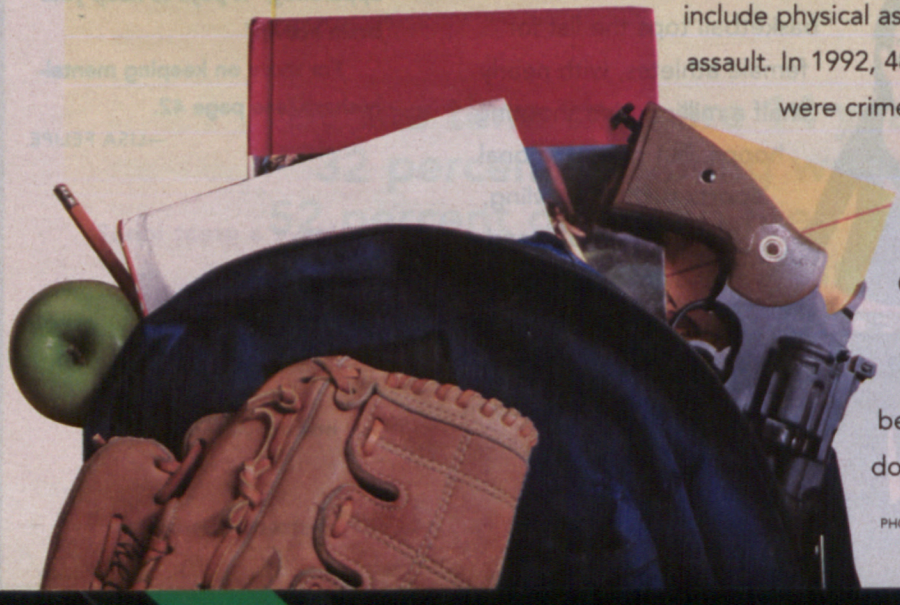
NEA IS DEVELOPING a workshop to train members in using the "education, not incarceration" argument for better school funding. It will be offered at the Representative Assembly and other conferences.

Some NEA members are bringing the issue into their classrooms. Last year, Oakland ninth-grade English teacher Jennifer Dannenberg's students studied California's budget and hammered out letters to their state legislators and governor urging them to shift funds from prisons to schools, for example, through early parole for non-violent offenders.

"I'm a picky writing teacher, so they had to be perfect. We went through four drafts," says Dannenberg. The students wrote from the heart about conditions in their own school. Only a few got answers, but she says it was still a good experience and they learned a lot about how to write a persuasive business letter. To see Dannenberg's lesson plans, and for more on this issue, visit www.nea.org/neatodayextra.

Safer Schools

Violent crime against students plummeted 50 percent in the decade from 1992 to 2002, according to a report from the U.S. Education and Justice Departments. Violent crimes include physical assault, robbery, rape, and sexual assault. In 1992, 48 of every 1,000 students ages 12–18 were crime victims, but that fell to 24 per 1,000 students in 2002. Thefts fell from 95 to 40 per 1,000 students.



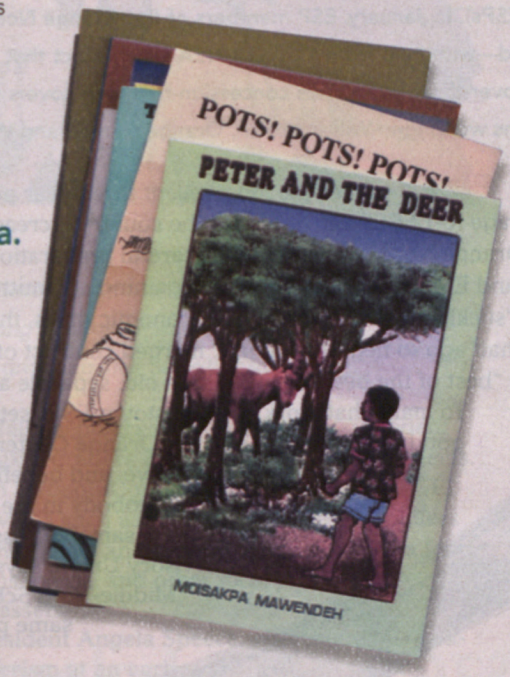
Also, the Centers for Disease Control report an encouraging decline in school fights. In 2003, 33 percent of students reported being in a physical fight at school, down from 42 percent 10 years earlier.

PHOTOS TOP: THINKSTOCK, DIGITAL VISION; PHOTO BOTTOM: S. WANKE/PHOTOLINK

Stories of Africa

In Africa, many teachers are forced to use learning materials dating from the colonial era, which are about Europe, not Africa, says Joanne Eide, head of NEA International Relations. So NEA, working through its international affiliate Education International, helps fund a project of the Pan African Teachers' Centre in West Africa that publishes story books written and illustrated by teachers themselves. The stories run the gamut from folktales to life in today's Africa. There's the story of the drought that almost killed the animals before the animals joined together to dig a deep well. And the one about a boy whose father sacrificed to send him to school. There are many more—and hundreds of teachers are using them.

The stories run the gamut from folktales to life in today's Africa.



Says Eide, "This program helps make up for the shortage of books, it's good professional development for the teachers, and the best part is the students are learning to read by reading stories about kids who look and act like them."

Teen Talk

Want to get students thinking about social issues and world affairs? Hundreds of teachers are getting help from a teen-run Web site where students from around the world talk about sex, drugs, patriotism, the President, hurting people's feelings, and...just about everything.

THE DISCUSSIONS can get high-pitched and wrenching. A recent debate over legalizing drugs elicited confessions from one former drug user who almost died. No way legalize, she said. But with legalization comes regulation, chimed in another. After all, "a dealer can give you a drug that's been laced with rat-poisoning."

The site is **www.newzcrew.org**, created by public television's *NewsHour* and a New York City organization called Global Kids. The exchanges are guided by high school students in Brooklyn, New York. These discussions are more structured than most online chats: Each has a limited number of participants, who say a little about themselves but stay anonymous. The discussion lasts four weeks but can be extended.

The Web site also offers background articles and lesson plans for teachers.

PHOTOS BOTTOM: NATHAN HAM

Global Takes

EU eTwins

The European Union is launching an effort to get 150,000 schools across the continent paired up over the Internet for joint teaching projects. Called "eTwinning," the effort is intended to spur students to serious study about each other's countries. "It is not about being pen pals," said an EU official. Schools will put information about themselves on a central Web site, and search for appropriate mates. Schools can also use the Web site to describe their international projects and learn what others are doing.

The program aims to develop a sense among children that they are citizens of Europe, not just of their own country.

Surf and Flunk

Shanghai University and other Chinese universities are suffering an epidemic of student failures because of a new disease called "Internet Addiction Disorder" or IAD, reports the *China Daily*. "Once they become obsessed with the Internet, playing games, or chatting online, they stop going to class and stay in Internet cafes or their dormitories, day and night," said a Shanghai University official. More than 360 students, mostly computer science majors, failed enough courses last year to be kicked out, but most were given reprieves.

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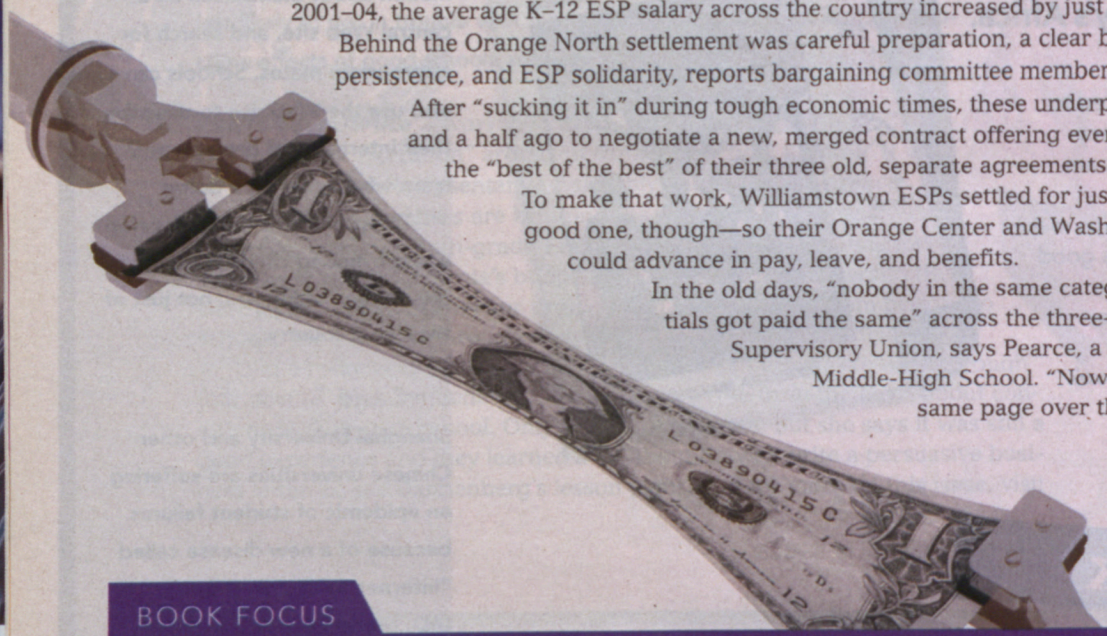
Vermont ESPs Bargain Big Raise

There are no strikes, slowdowns, or swear words in this bargaining tale, just good Vermont sense and a good—no, great—settlement for a sturdy group of education support professionals (ESPs). In January, ESP members of the Orange North Education Association bargained—with help from Vermont-NEA—a contract that provides raises of 15 to 23.58 percent over three years. This concession-free pact covers secretaries, paraeducators, and custodians working in Williamstown, Orange Center, and Washington Village schools.



NEED A LITTLE PERSPECTIVE? Over the most recent three-year period studied by NEA Research, 2001–04, the average K–12 ESP salary across the country increased by just under 10 percent.

Behind the Orange North settlement was careful preparation, a clear bargaining proposal, dogged persistence, and ESP solidarity, reports bargaining committee member Renee Pearce.

After "sucking it in" during tough economic times, these underpaid ESPs resolved a year and a half ago to negotiate a new, merged contract offering everybody in the three towns the "best of the best" of their three old, separate agreements.

To make that work, Williamstown ESPs settled for just a salary increase—a really good one, though—so their Orange Center and Washington Village colleagues could advance in pay, leave, and benefits.

In the old days, "nobody in the same category with the same credentials got paid the same" across the three-town Orange North Supervisory Union, says Pearce, a secretary at Williamstown Middle-High School. "Now we'll get everybody on the same page over three years!"

BOOK FOCUS

Two-Way Inspiration

A good novelist can engage and inspire students. Sometimes the students return the favor.

Searching for a book that would resonate with students who failed the Indiana state test, special education teacher Lenore Hoffman stumbled on *Not as Crazy as I Seem* (Houghton Miflin, 2003). Devon Brown, the novel's main character, is a 15-year-old neat freak fixated on the number four and obsessed with germs.

"I thought this book would appeal to my kids," said Hoffman, a teacher at Valparaiso High School in Valparaiso, Indiana. "The dialogue is authentic, and the kids could relate to Devon's isolation because many of these kids feel like outcasts."

Hoffman asked the author, George Harrar, to correspond with her class. Harrar, a 55-year-old writer from Massachusetts, enthusiastically agreed.

Hoffman's students, many of whom are Spanish-speaking immigrants, wrote letters describing what they liked about the book and sharing ideas for future novels. Many related to Devon's character as a loner trying to adjust to a new school in a new city.

One student suggested Harrar write a novel about Ben, one of *Crazy's* oddball characters. He even suggested a title: "Not as Ballistic as I Seem." Harrar loved the title, and he's just finished writing a book that uses it.

"I love hearing from readers," says Harrar. He had gotten student feedback for *Not as Crazy as I Seem* before it was published, asking a high school class to read a chapter to make sure the teens' language was accurate.

Hoffman feels the experience was wonderful for her students. "It was a strong exercise in writing and critical thinking," she says. "I would definitely do it again."

—THOMAS GRILLO

PHOTO TOP: CHAD BAKER

A Score of Helping Hands

Youngstown youngsters sang to seniors, with coaching by NEA student members.

NEA student members from Ohio have found a way to gain valuable experience while benefiting sixth-grade students and the Youngstown community. All it took was giving up their Saturdays for a while.

ON FIVE CONSECUTIVE WEEKENDS last fall, members of the Youngstown Student Education Association (YSEA) led the sixth graders in community service projects.

The program, Discover Youngstown through Community Experience (DYCE), engaged the children in a range of activities such as writing messages to soldiers in Iraq, singing for residents at a nursing home, and decorating cookies for a food bank. The students also toured museums, parks, and other local points of interest to better appreciate their community's assets.

DYCE is the brainchild of YSEA President Angela Speece who believes educators should stress the merits of volunteerism at an early age.

Speece is one of 60,000 students belonging to NEA's Student Program, which provides future educators with opportunities in leadership training and professional development.

—DANIEL MOISE

Mr. Kalapaca?

I was hired last minute to teach a kindergarten class that had originally been assigned to my teaching partner, Mr. Kalapaca. Mr. Kalapaca had sent a card to each family introducing himself as the teacher for their child. So, on the first day of school, in comes little Juan. He walks up to me, shakes my hand, and says in his formal voice: "Hello Mr. Kalapaca," proud that he had memorized his teacher's name, but not realizing that because I am Ms. Greene, I couldn't possibly be Mr. Kalapaca. This is my first year of teaching, and I will always remember Juan!

—JERRI ELLEN GREENE
Kindergarten teacher
Rialto, California

Two-Minute Tips

Door Bell Review

Here's a review idea I've used in first grade: I put dry erase contact paper on my door and write math and other problems on the paper. Next, I bought a wireless door chime. Several times a day, I ring the door bell and ask a student to "answer the door" (answer one of the questions). At the end of the day, we check answers.

The door chime has a time delay so I can push the door bell, attached under my desk, and move away before it rings. My children never could figure out who was ringing the bell!

—KAREN SPOONER
Columbus, Ohio

Clothes Line Hang-Up

The last time I dragged tables around my room to climb up and hang student art projects from the ceiling, I remembered the pictures of old tenement buildings with clotheslines suspended across alleys. The old-timers reeled in their laundry. I realized I could do the same with yarn tied in a loop. I stand on one table, reel in the yarn, attach a paper, and pull it along. The line goes across my room. I only have to climb on one table. Should save the district on worker's comp.

—SUSAN HOPKINS
Second-grade teacher, Piru, California

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www.nea.org/joyner

Give Up? Never.

Members across the country show how keeping the pressure on the fight to fix NCLB can make a difference at home.

Perseverance pays. That's the lesson the North Dakota Education Association (NDEA) learned in its recent stand-off with the U.S. Department of Education over the definition of who's qualified to teach in that state. At issue was the Department's insistence—not just once, but in two separate rulings in December and January—that North Dakota's 6,000 elementary and middle school teachers did not meet the "highly qualified" standard under the federal, so-called No Child Left Behind law (NCLB).

But NDEA and its allies—school administrators, school board members, the governor, and state legislators—refused to back down, even when the Department reaffirmed its ruling. They sounded the message loud and clear that North Dakota teachers are already highly qualified and pressed the Department to take a closer look at the state's high content standards for licensure and teacher training, both in place since the 1960s. Finally, after two months of hard and heavy lobbying, the Department reversed its decision.

What made the difference? "The hours, the strategy, the calls, the meetings too numerous to count," says Gloria Lokken, NDEA president.

Dramatic, for sure, but the NDEA victory is just one of many examples of how grassroots activism around NCLB has yielded big dividends for NEA members since the law took effect three years ago. From California to Maine, Association activists have locked arms to draw attention to the law's flaws and problems. They've attended hearings, written letters to the editor, shared NCLB absurdities with the press, held house parties, and found numerous other ways to get NEA's fix-and-fund message to the public and members of Congress, Republicans and Democrats.

"SO MANY OF THE education issues we address are complex, and our own experience tells us that the solutions are not always simple or speedy."

—NEA PRESIDENT REG WEAVER

Now, three years later, public opinion polls show that support for NCLB is dropping. And in the last year alone, the Administration announced four major rules changes that have added much-needed flexibility in the areas of special education, limited-English proficient students, "highly qualified" teacher rules, and the student test participation rate.

NEA President Reg Weaver says it's grassroots activism that's made the difference. Pointing to the resolve among North Dakota educators, he says, "It's exactly that kind of persistence and energy that pays off for our members and our students." Still, he adds, "So many of the education issues we address are complex, and our own experience tells us that the solutions are not always simple or speedy."

Consider Eureka, Illinois, kindergarten teacher and grassroots activist Sara Kaufman as a case in point. It was in October 2003 when she first invited Congressman Ray LaHood (R-IL) to meet with teachers from her local and region on NCLB. "We came to him in a civil, peaceful, Martin Luther King-kind of way," she says. "We wanted to make sure he knew that we weren't blaming him for the flaws in the law, and that what we wanted was to make it more livable, more workable."

Kaufman thinks the Association struck gold that night. LaHood appreciated the pragmatic approach, and since then, the conversations have expanded to include other NCLB stakeholders, such as regional superintendents and members of the Illinois legislature. The bigger group has met several times, and LaHood has shared some of their specific concerns with Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), a key player on NCLB issues in Congress.

NDEA's state magazine announces victory: persistent lobbying by NDEA and its allies overturned a Department of Education ruling that North Dakota teachers failed to meet the "highly qualified" standard under NCLB.

And then there's language arts teacher Coy Marquardt, vice president of the Iowa City Education Association, who has been speaking out on NCLB every chance he gets. He's made presentations to Association building reps and solicited testimonials from teaching colleagues on the ill effects of the law. He's lobbied state and federal legislators on the need to fix and fund NCLB and participated in community forums on the law. He's talked with local reporters about NCLB's flaws and written letters to the editor to keep the issue in the public's eye.

"Everyone, including our Republican and Democratic officials, recognizes there are significant problems with the law," Marquardt says. "The challenge will be to keep the pressure up until the necessary changes are made."

Back in North Dakota, teachers say they're clear about what can happen when members refuse to throw in the towel. "You never know the connections that may be out there—so you do everything you can think of and pray it will work," says NDEA's Lokken.

"We never doubted our teachers were highly qualified," she adds, "but it was a relief to have the Department of Education finally agree with us."

—NANCY KOCHUK

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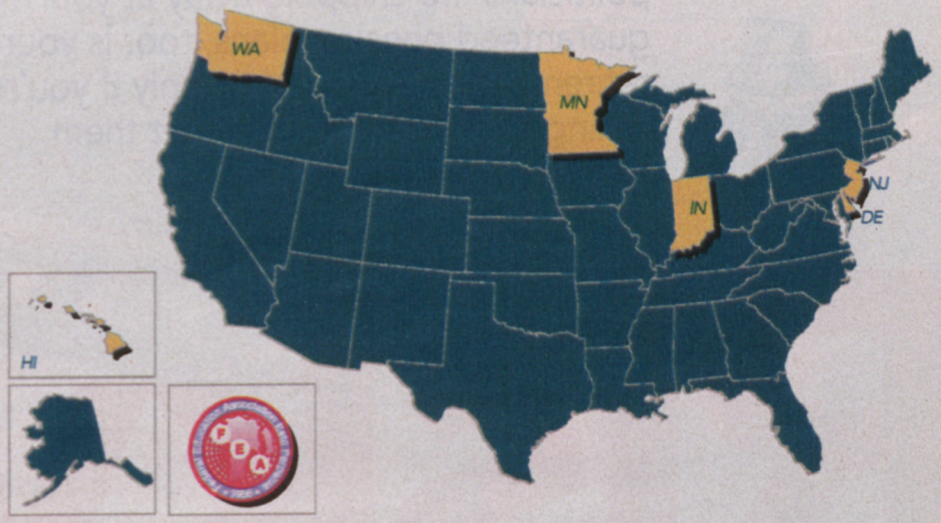


Bidding Aloha to Hawaii

HAWAII During this year's legislative session, the **Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA)** aired media spots highlighting an alarming crisis: More than 1,600 public school teachers will quit this year for other, higher paying professions or for employment on the mainland. A new HSTA survey finds that the state could lose up to 50 percent of its teachers within five years.

The troubles in paradise: the scope of teaching duties, crushing expectations, and—above all—low pay. Among other things, HSTA is proposing a "45-60-100" plan with a $45,000 salary for entry level teachers, a $60,000 average, and a $100,000 salary for the longest-serving and highest-qualified educators.

Hoosiers at Fiscal Crossroads

INDIANA The Hoosier State's fiscal situation is at a "crisis level," reports the **Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA).** Economic shocks, ranging from the 2001 recession to a slowdown of the state's large manufacturing sector, have left Indiana with a structural deficit of some $800 million. After a series of short-term fixes—state funding cuts, delays, and "redirections"—Indiana stands at a "fiscal crossroads," says ISTA.

Newly elected Governor Mitch Daniels is taking his best shot, proposing, among other things, a temporary income tax surcharge on the top 1 percent of earners and a two-year budget freeze for K–12 education.

ISTA applauds Daniels for initiating public discussion on a progressive tax increase, but urges him to implement the idea on a broader scale and fund public education through a "permanent and progressive" general tax increase. This will require a hard look at the corporate tax structure, both in terms of rates and accountability for tax incentives handed to companies.

The Con of the Con Con

NEW JERSEY The state's sky-high property taxes, which help fund public education, need "meaningful reform" now, **New Jersey Education Association (NJEA)** leaders recently told a legislative committee. But that's the job of the elected legislature, not a proposed Constitutional Convention. This so-called "Con Con," NJEA warned, would cost $4 million to run, "take two years to accomplish something," and be likely to "blindly cut property taxes without a plan for maintaining services."

NJEA is proposing its own tax reform legislation in partnership with other organizations opposed to the con of the Con Con—including the NAACP.

Flexibility to Weaken Rights

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE In a grab for "management flexibility," the Pentagon has released its proposal for a new National Security Personnel System (NSPS), which it aims to implement by July. For **Federal Education Association (FEA)** members in Defense Department schools, NSPS could mean weakened bargaining and due process rights.

FEA and other federal unions are pursuing strategies to make NSPS fairer for workers. "The scope of issues we will bargain may be changed and we may be required to pursue litigation in different forms," says FEA President Sheridan Pearce, "but at the end of the process FEA will still be there for its members." For updates, go to www.feaonline.org.

Broken Promises: Exhibit A

MINNESOTA A judge has ordered the West St. Paul-Mendota Heights-Eagan school district to pay damages to the **West St. Paul Federation of Teachers** that may exceed $300,000—what the district saved by suddenly and (illegally) increasing teacher out-of-pocket costs in one of its two negotiated health insurance plans. The judge also ordered the district to reinstate the old plan.

Broken Promises: Exhibit B

DELAWARE The Delaware Supreme Court has spoken: Retired school nurse Karen Wood, who lives with multiple sclerosis (MS), is entitled to lifetime disability benefits from the Appoquinimink school district. Back in 1998 the district stopped disability payments to Wood and another disabled employee, even though it had bargained this life-saving insurance benefit in its contract with the **Appoquinimink Education Association.**

Wood, who kept detailed records throughout her battle—which began when she was diagnosed with MS in 1994—was assisted by the **Delaware State Education Association.** Wood's advice to all educators: Join the Association, know your contract, and use it.

Everyday Low Pay—Always

WASHINGTON First the good news: The **Washington Education Association (WEA)** is marking the 10th anniversary of the WEA Children's Fund, which provides $50,000 a year to pay for the needs of hard-pressed students, everything from warm coats to basic school supplies. The not-so-good news: Many of the receipts members submit to the fund for reimbursement are from—sigh—Wal-Mart.

In a gentle reminder to these generous souls, WEA President Charles Hasse notes that Wal-Mart's "exploitative labor practices have added to public assistance burdens in our state and across the nation." Warm 'n fuzzy commercials aside, Hasse says, "The fact remains that a great many of our students and their families suffer as a result of Wal-Mart's poverty-level wages and benefits."

Is your retirement safe?

Social Security is under attack, and politicians are chipping away at your guaranteed pension plans, too. Is your retirement safe? Yes—but only if you're willing to fight for it. Don't let them gamble away your future.

Risky Business

BY JOHN O'NEIL

University of Virginia graduate student Lianna Moss is in many ways your typical 22-year-old college student—juggling classes and part-time work, catching *Law and Order* with her roommates whenever she can, scarfing down way too many meals at Subway.

But Moss distinguishes herself from other 20-somethings on one count. Thanks to training from the Virginia Education Association (VEA), she can spin an easy argument about the advantages of traditional pension plans and the importance of keeping Social Security strong. And that training has helped the Student VEA president understand that, contrary to what many younger Americans growing up in the era of 401 (k)s and the dot-com bust believe, Social Security is not in imminent danger of collapse.

"I know everybody keeps saying that Social Security will run out of money, but from what I've been reading, that's a farce," says Moss. "My philosophy is, don't fix it if it's not broken."

Moss won't start her first teaching job until next fall, but she's already working hard to defend her retirement security. Whether you're new on the job or a grizzled vet, you may want to follow suit, because politicians are moving fast to phase out guaranteed monthly pensions in favor of individual retirement accounts that would subject you to the ups and downs of the stock market—and possibly leave you shortchanged come retirement day. Consider that in the past few months:

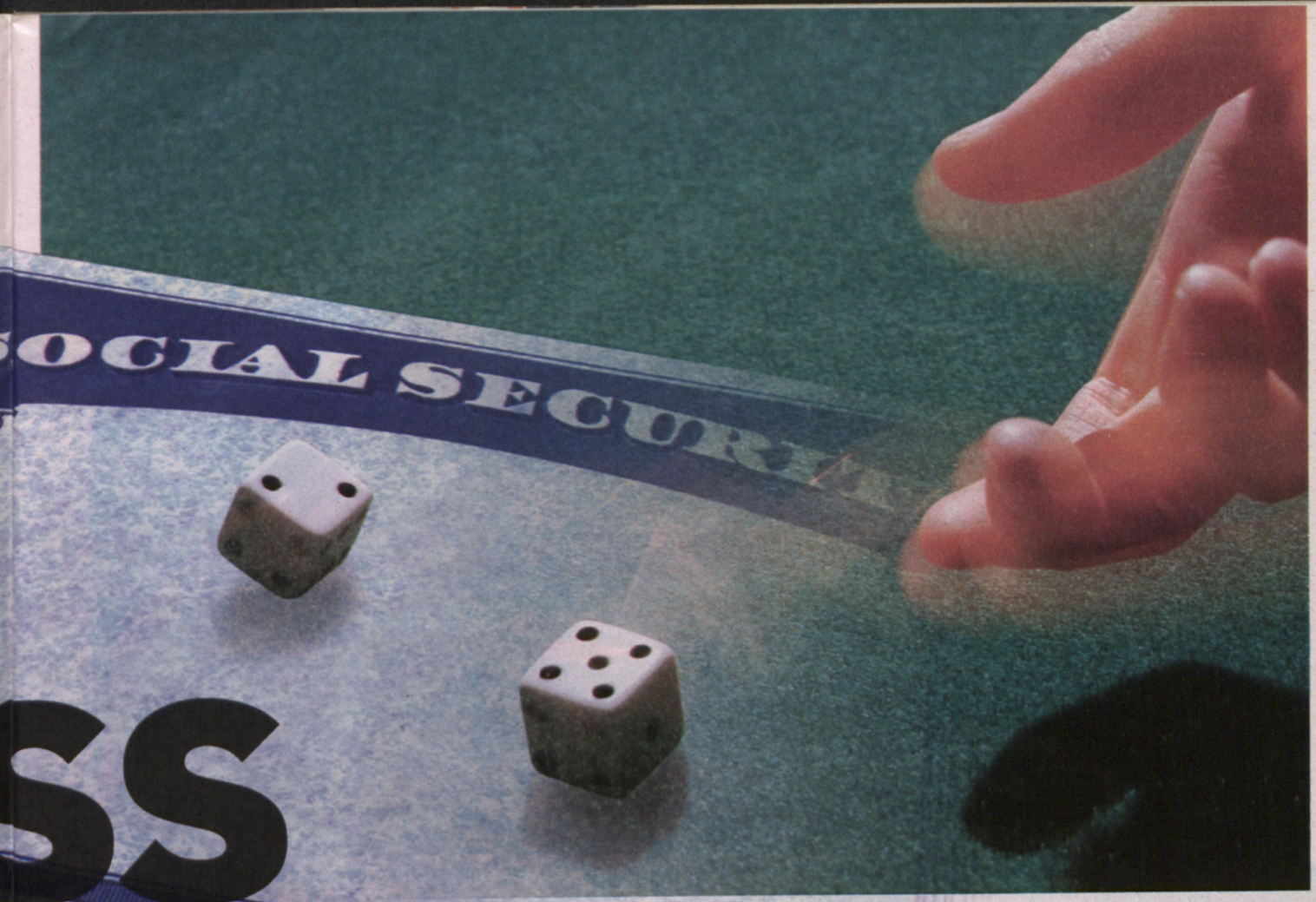
PRESIDENT BUSH BEGAN HIS DRIVE to privatize Social Security, a move that would punch huge holes in the foremost "safety net" of retirement income for American workers. If Bush has his way, risky private investment accounts offered to workers would be accompanied by cuts to guaranteed benefits that could reach 40 percent for younger employees.

IN JANUARY, CALIFORNIA Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vowed to scrap guaranteed pensions for teachers and public employees hired after 2007, a move that would deal crushing blows to the nation's first and fourth largest pension plans. Schwarzenegger said new employees would have to accept "defined-contribution" (DC) plans, such as 401 (k)s, that don't

If Social Security is privatized, younger workers would see their guaranteed benefit cut as much as 40 percent.

40%

PHOTO: BRAND X IMAGES



provide a guaranteed retirement benefit.

ELSEWHERE, LEGISLATORS IN Alaska, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Virginia either have introduced bills or are studying whether to follow Schwarzenegger's lead and force public employees into risky DC plans.

The implication is clear: those retirement benefits you've been counting on when you finally walk away from public education are on the line in Congress and in your state legislatures.

"We're seeing a full-frontal assault on secure defined-benefit pensions—whether it's Social Security or your state pension fund," says Lily Eskelsen, NEA secretary-treasurer and a former trustee of the Utah state pension fund. "Those behind it are counting on the idea that you'll give up a guaranteed lifetime benefit for a chance to take a thrill ride in the stock market. Don't fall for it."

The Politics of Aging

So what's behind this push? For one, a changing demographic. Pension funds and Social Security itself face challenges from the surge in the number of baby boomers due to retire over the next two to three decades—and expected to live longer in retirement than past generations. So guaranteed retirement funds, such as Social Security and traditional defined-benefit (DB) pension plans, must come up with the funding to pay growing numbers of retirees for far more years than in past decades.

The sticking point is that some policy makers believe you—not your employer—should be on the hook if funds for your retirement come up short.

The debate centers on risk, and who should bear it.

A quick primer: all retirement funds—traditional pension funds as well as individual accounts such as 401 (k)s—generate a substantial portion of the nest egg by investing in an array of stocks and bonds.

In a traditional DB pension plan, which is what 90 percent of public employees belong to, trustees guided by professional money managers make the investments. The investment strategy is long-term because the fund pools contributions on behalf of hundreds of thousands or millions of participants, all of whom are due to retire at different times. Most importantly, the investment risk is borne by the fund itself, since it must make good on the guaranteed benefits it owes current and future retirees.

Under defined-contribution plans such as 401 (k)s, which have become more common in the private sector, the employee bears all the risk because the account balance of his or her personal nest egg is the only source of retirement savings. There's no such thing as a guaranteed monthly retirement check under a DC plan. If you make poor investment decisions—or are just unlucky enough to have the financial markets go south when you retire—you'd be the one who would suffer the consequences. Workers with 401 (k) plans were extraordinarily hard-hit by the huge stock market declines of 2000–02; many saw their retirement nest eggs decimated.

PHOTO: COMSTOCK IMAGES; PHOTO COLLAGE: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.

A sophomore at the University of California-Davis, **Annie Pestolesi** plans to become a teacher. But if the state's pension plan is gutted, she may look outside the Golden State. "Who's going to give me a long-term commitment?"

'The Tide Has Turned'

Wall Street's run-up during the 1990s and subsequent collapse sowed the seeds for some of the current efforts to convert defined-benefit plans covering public employees to defined-contribution plans.

For starters, the sharp gains on Wall Street pumped up the value of pension funds. As they grew flush, many were able to cut the contribution rates of employers such as local and state governments. Naturally, they grew accustomed to the lower rates.

Now, "the tide has turned," says Leonard Bumbaca, a math teacher at Annandale High School in Annandale, Virginia, and a pension trustee. "State and local governments are being hit with requirements to make extra contributions." And with their burden rising, experts say, they may be more open to changes that lessen their obligation.

They're getting some enticing nudging, too.

Anti-tax groups, such as Americans for Tax Reform and Club for Growth (now sponsoring television ads touting private Social Security accounts), are playing an increasingly influential role in promoting private individual retirement accounts over defined-benefit pensions for public employees. The pro-voucher American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a network of state legislators with backing from conservative foundations and large corporations, trains legislators in "public pension modernization"—in plain speak, substituting defined-contribution plans for defined-benefit plans.

"They're using buzzwords like 'choice' and 'individual empowerment,' and they say DC plans will allow you to 'take charge of your own retirement,'" says Clare Barnett, a veteran social studies teacher in Danbury, Connecticut, and vice-president of the National Council on Teacher Retirement. But their real motive, she and others say, is to cut taxes and enrich private businesses at the expense of public institutions and employees.

For many it's plain to see: Large financial firms have a huge stake in the phase-out of traditional pensions in favor of individual retirement accounts, notes Max Bochmann, a school bus mechanic and trustee of the Illinois Municipal Retirement Fund. That's because they'll earn far more charging fees to individuals managing their own retirement accounts than they would dealing with the mammoth pension funds.

Education employees need to be wary, then, of the burgeoning campaign to portray DB plans as a time bomb of public obli-

Without Social Security, nearly one-half of elderly Americans would fall below the poverty line.

gation soon to explode, Bochmann and others warn.

"To create a crisis atmosphere, they'll claim that plans are severely underfunded," says Nancy McKenzie, a pension specialist with NEA. Actually, the average pension funding level now is about 90 percent. By comparison, in the 1970s, average funding was only 50 percent.

"The reality is that these funds have a 30-year time frame," for smoothing out the effects of investment gains and losses, says McKenzie. "They will have ups and downs, but the funds are managed by professionals and adjustments will be made."

Critics of DB plans also overstate the public's funding obligation, McKenzie points out. Nationally, only about one-fourth of the cost of pension benefits is borne by public employers; the remainder comes from contributions by the employees themselves and from investment earnings.

Battle Brews in California

California is shaping up as the major state battleground this year for protecting guaranteed retirement benefits.

Schwarzenegger, who charged that the state's pension funds are "another financial train on another track to disaster," is supporting a bill in the state legislature to bar public employees after 2007 from joining a defined-benefit pension plan. He has vowed that, if the legislature does not pass the bill, he'll back a ballot initiative proposal by the anti-tax Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association that's waiting in the wings.

Schwarzenegger's move to terminate new enrollment into the California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS) and the California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) after July 2007 is the biggest threat to a state pension fund in recent memory, in part because of the scope of the two systems and the tendency for California's policy ideas to migrate to other states.

CalPERS, which represents 1.4 million state and municipal employees, including education support professionals, is the nation's largest pension fund, with $182 billion in assets. CalSTRS has 750,000 members and assets of $125 billion.

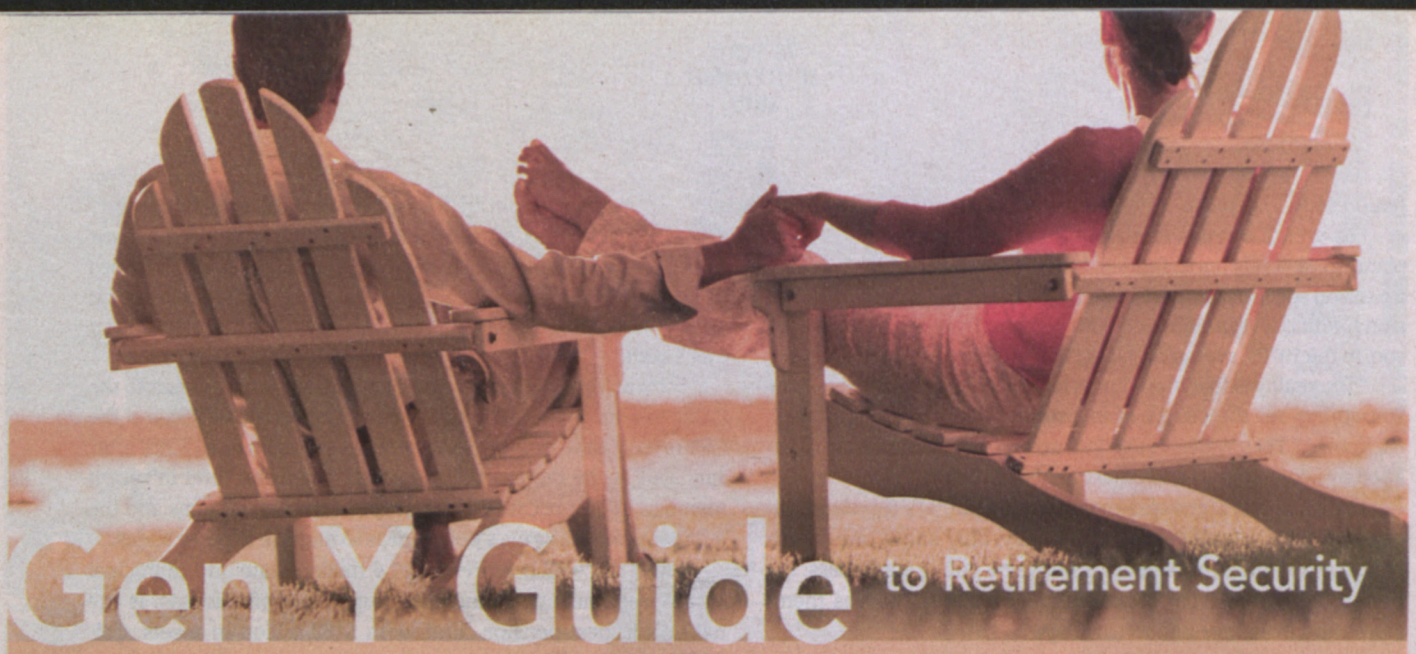
Barbara Kerr, president of the California Teachers Association (CTA), says that after Schwarzenegger announced

A Million Dollar Benefit?

It might be easy to take your pension for granted, says Roger Rea, a retired high school chemistry teacher in Omaha, Nebraska. But if you tried to generate enough cash in your savings account to yield the equivalent of a modest pension—say about $40,000 a year—you'd have to come up with a cool million. "And for each addition of $1,000 a month in income, you'd need to have saved another $230,000."

When Wall Street is hot, workers relying solely on 401 (k) plans may dazzle you with the bottom-line sums on their investment statements. But if their investments sour, or they just happen to live to a ripe old age, their 401 (k) account could run out. Just remember that you've got pension power behind you.

PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE TOP: SCOTT LORENZO; BOTTOM: MACDUFF EVERTON;
PHOTO THIS PAGE: BILL LAUER; MONEY STACK: BRIAN HAGIWARA; PHOTO COLLAGE: GROFF CREATIVE, INC.



Gen Y Guide to Retirement Security

OKAY, SO YOU HAVEN'T YET REACHED FOR THE HAIR DYE, AND YOU'RE NOT CONVINCED ALL THIS TALK ABOUT RETIREMENT SECURITY IS FOR YOU. TAKE THIS QUIZ AND DISCOVER WHETHER YOU NEED AN ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT.

1. When do you make your first decision about retirement?

A. RETIREMENT? Hey, I'm just getting started here!
B. THE FIRST TIME I'm tapped for cafeteria duty after a morning spent trying to convince 90 14-year-olds why they should care about gerunds.
C. MY FIRST YEAR on the job—sometimes the very first month.
D. WHEN I WHITTLE the choices down to desert skies in Arizona or palm trees and ocean breezes in Florida.

ANSWER-C. Often you begin filling out retirement paperwork, including the naming of a beneficiary (spouse, parent, no boyfriends, please) within a few months of starting your job. If you participate in a defined-contribution plan or enroll in a supplemental retirement savings plan, you may also have to choose investment options. Yes, your first year's a killer, but jump on this stuff from the get-go. Read plan documents carefully and get help from your building rep or others if you need it.

2. Who's most likely to be financially secure during their golden years?

A. YOU, WITH YOUR pension from the state retirement system, which will provide you with some guaranteed cash when you finally put away the chalk and bookbag.
B. THE GUY IN THE apartment next door who works for the Internet start-up. He's got a 401 (k) loaded with company stock and a lifetime supply of Red Bull.
C. YOUR ECCENTRIC second cousin, who collects rare stamps and keeps his savings under his mattress.
D. DISGRACED FORMER Securities and Exchange Commission chair Richard Grasso, whose severance package set the high-water mark for corporate profligacy.

ANSWER-A. The pension is best. Your neighbor's 401 (k) will go up and down with the stock market and could eventually run out. Grasso's loaded, but think of his legal bills! As for your cousin—is his homeowners insurance paid up?

3. When will Social Security go broke?

A. I THOUGHT IT was already broke. Somebody alert Fox News!
B. 2018, WHEN THE system begins to pay out more in benefits than it takes in through those mysterious "FICA" deductions on my paycheck.
C. 2042, WHEN THE Social Security Trust Fund has all been spent paying benefits to Maw-Maw and Pop.
D. NONE OF THE ABOVE.

ANSWER-D. As long as Social Security continues to generate revenue through payroll taxes, it will never be "broke." It may not be able to pay full benefits after 2042, but even pessimists say it could pay at least 75 percent. Minor adjustments to generate more revenue—such as a slight hike in the payroll tax or a change to increase the amount of high-income earners' salaries subject to the tax—would allow the government to guarantee full benefits far longer.

4. You've just scored a 5 percent pay increase. Congratulations! Your next move is to...

A. START RESEARCHING jumbo-sized plasma TVs.
B. OPEN UP, or increase your contribution to, a tax-deferred supplemental retirement account, such as a 403 (b).
C. ADD SAVINGS to the kids' college fund.
D. WHO'S GETTING 5 percent pay increases?

ANSWER-B. Try to push at least some of any "new" money you get into a retirement account. Most financial experts suggest your retirement funding is a higher priority than college savings, because there are always other options for financing college costs later.

5. Your state plans to cut retiree health benefits. Yikes! So you're going to...

A. RELY ON YOUR superior immune system—strengthened by years of exposure to student viruses of every stripe—to keep you out of the doctor's office.
B. HOPE WE CAN WIN back the benefit when the economy picks up.
C. BAND TOGETHER WITH your colleagues and put the all-court press on state lawmakers.
D. TAKE UP TAI CHI and start stockpiling ibuprofen.

ANSWER-C. Tai chi is great, but you need to fight to keep your health benefits. A benefit lost now is a benefit you're not likely to win back! And retiree health coverage is especially important if you plan to retire before you're eligible for Medicare.

PHOTO: STEWART COHEN

Is your retirement safe?

his plan to push employees into a defined-contribution plan, "the only people dancing in the street were the people on Wall Street." Brokerage houses will load up on fees for managing individual retirement accounts, she says, far beyond what they can gain doing business with the pension fund. CTA is fighting Schwarzenegger's proposals with a blitz of radio ads and also has joined a coalition with groups representing state employees, firefighters, and police officers, Kerr says.

Dana Dillon, a teacher at Weed Union Elementary in Weed, California, views Schwarzenegger's plan as "a serious threat."

She's in a good position to know because two years ago, Dillon was elected to a seat on the board of CalSTRS. At a meeting in February, the board voted 10-2 to oppose the plan to close the pension fund to new enrollees after 2007. Schwarzenegger promptly removed four appointed members of the board who voted against him—but Dillon, as an elected representative, was safe.

New employees stuck in a DC plan wouldn't have a real benefit to count on, Dillon says. "It's a bad deal, because it takes a guaranteed benefit and makes it into an iffy proposition. Take a look at the debacles of Enron and WorldCom. People lost their retirement accounts totally."

And efforts to recruit teachers will be harder without a solid pension plan, Dillon says. "In the public sector, we tend to have lower salaries," she points out, "and one of the things that makes that a little easier to swallow is that we have an adequate, guaranteed retirement benefit."

A little retirement security would suit Annie Pestolesi just fine. But as a sophomore at the University of California-Davis—due to graduate in 2007—Pestolesi worries she can't count on it.

President of the Student California Teachers Association, Pestolesi hails from a family of teachers and plans to teach herself after graduation. She's majoring in environmental biology and management. Her parents, Lissa and Bob Pestolesi, are both public school teachers and participants in CalSTRS.

"They're in the process of planning their retirement—where they're going to go and so on," says Pestolesi. "And they know how much money they'll have per month" to budget with.

"Having that security is something I'd love to have," she adds. "I love teaching, but where? Who's going to give me the option for a long-term commitment?" If the opportunity to get a traditional pension through CalSTRS isn't available to her, "I might look for a job in a different state," she says. It will be California's loss.

Traditional Plans Win Out

While Schwarzenegger steers California educators toward financial insecurity by forcing public employees to accept risky DC plans, the evidence that DB plans afford better retirement security continues to stack up.

Nebraska, which has offered both DB and DC plans to different groups of public employees, is a textbook case for the advantages of traditional pension plans, says Roger Rea, a former teacher in Omaha and member of the Nebraska State Education Association-Retired.

The Nebraska Public Employees' Retirement Systems (NPERS) operates separate defined-benefit plans covering teachers, state patrol workers, and judges. NPERS also runs a defined-contribution plan for state employees and another for county employees.

A Fix Worth Fighting For

AS CONGRESS BEGINS ITS DEBATE OVER SOCIAL SECURITY, Chuck Riegler, a high school math teacher in Canton, Ohio, is working to make sure lawmakers tackle a problem that really does need fixing: the so-called Social Security Offsets.

Thousands of public employees in 15 states, like Riegler, are denied Social Security benefits earned by themselves or their spouses because of the Government Pension Offset (GPO) or Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). (Most of those affected are educators who work in states that do not pay into Social Security—Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, and Ohio—or selected districts in Georgia, Rhode Island, and Texas.)

Riegler was in Washington, D.C., recently as a member of NEA's GPO/WEP cadre, which promotes grassroots action to get these unfair laws overturned. Before he headed to Capitol Hill to talk to his members of Congress, Riegler admitted it irked him that lawmakers will consider expensive new changes to Social Security—but have so far failed to pass NEA-backed legislation to repeal the GPO and WEP.

"It gripes me that when you talk to legislators, they say, 'What about the cost?'" says Riegler. "But they've been borrowing money from the Social Security Trust Fund for the war, and to pay for tax cuts, and for every other thing."

So Riegler and other NEA members headed to Capitol Hill to press NEA's message on Social Security to members of Congress, and by week's end, the NEA-backed Social Security Fairness Act to repeal the offsets had picked up several additional sponsors. The Act, introduced by Representatives Howard McKeon (R-CA) and Howard Berman (D-CA), had won the support of 213 co-sponsors at press time.

In addition to working to protect Social Security from privatization and repealing the GPO and WEP, NEA also is trying to ensure any changes to Social Security do not include provisions for mandatory coverage. That's because requiring all workers to participate in Social Security would hurt existing public employee pension plans and create financial burdens for state and city governments.

Already, more than 30,000 NEA members like Riegler have signed a petition urging Congress to repeal GPO and WEP and protect Social Security from privatization or benefit cuts. Let them hear from you, too! Sign the petition at www.nea.org/lac/socsec.

PHOTO: COLIN ANDERSON

Is your retirement safe?

A study that compared returns for the NPERS plans found that between 1983 and 1999, the DB plans yielded an average of 11 percent per year, compared with 6 percent for those participating in the DC plans. The difference in returns had a marked effect on the ability of workers to count on an adequate benefit at retirement.

NPERS' study found that the DB plans offered their participants income replacement averaging 60 to 70 percent. The state and county workers in the DC plans, however, got a benefit of only about 25 to 30 percent income replacement. "The defined-contribution plan just does not provide the returns they need to get the benefits they require," says Rea.

Informed by such dramatic results, Nebraska in 2003 offered its state and county workers a defined-benefit plan and allowed workers presently languishing in the defined-contribution plan to switch over.

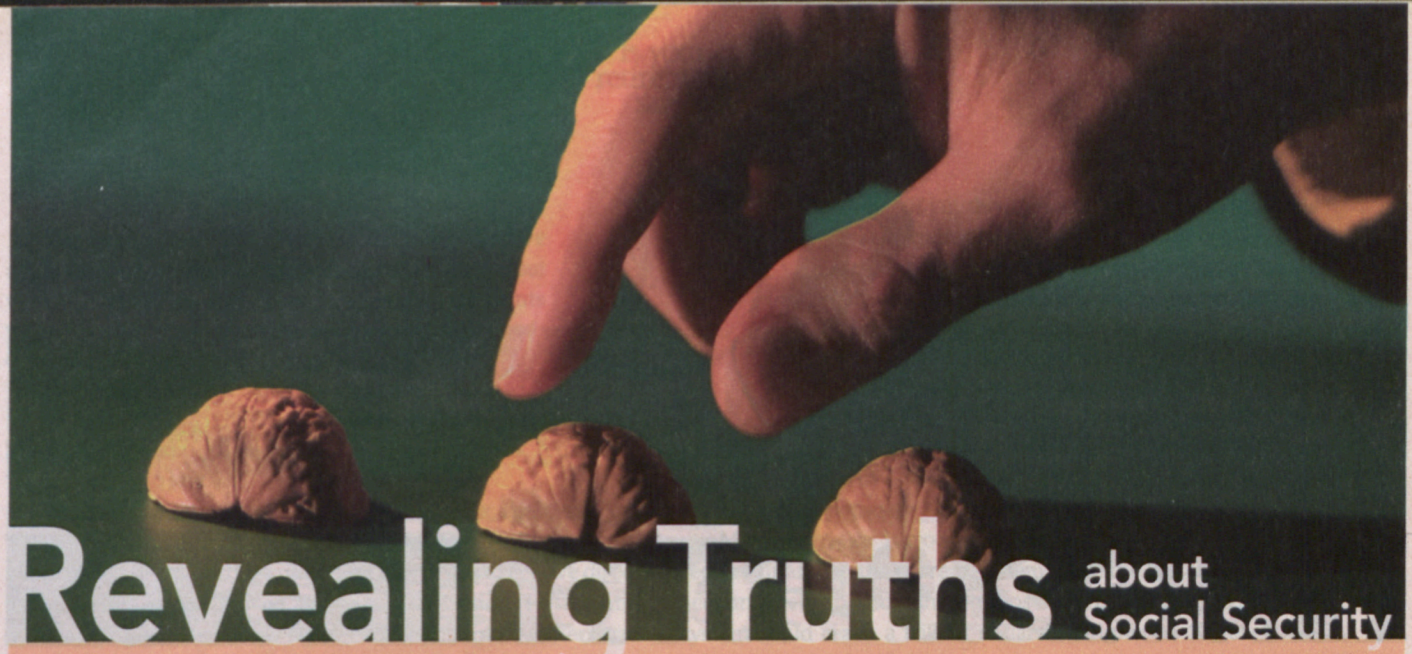
Nebraska isn't the only state that's soured on its DC plan. West Virginia, which in 1991 began requiring all new employees to enter a new DC plan, is also looking into switching back to its traditional DB pension system, according to David Haney, executive director of the West Virginia Education Association (WVEA). The defined-contribution plan has been beset by problems: the plan offered too few investment choices, employees were given inadequate information to make investment decisions, and the account statements were hard to understand.

"It's just turned out to be a mess," Haney says. And as a result, "We're going to have a lot of people who are going to have to work long after they should have been able to retire" because their DC plans will fall short.

WVEA is asking the state legislature to merge the DC plan with the more established DB plan, a move that would bolster employees' retirement security as well as save the state an estimated $1.8 billion over the next 30 years.

The 401 (k)-style retirement accounts are a bad deal for public employees, says **Dana Dillon,** a teacher in Weed, California, and a trustee of the state's pension system for teachers. "Take a look at the debacles of Enron and WorldCom. People lost their retirement accounts totally."

PHOTOS: MICHAEL BURKE



Revealing Truths about Social Security

CONFUSED ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY? SMALL WONDER. AS THE DEBATE OVER THE LANDMARK PROGRAM KICKS OFF, CONFUSION REIGNS—AND SPIN-FREE FACTS ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY. WHAT YOU HEAR ON THE STREET OR OVER THE AIRWAVES AIN'T NECESSARILY SO. HERE'S THE REAL DEAL.

What you heard "Social Security is going broke."

The real deal

The surplus in the Social Security Trust Fund is climbing because payroll taxes and interest on the Trust Fund accumulations bring in more each year than Social Security pays out in benefits. The Trust Fund now stands at $1.5 trillion and is predicted by trustees to reach $5.3 trillion by 2018.

The year 2018 is a critical one because that's when actuaries predict that Social Security will begin paying out more dollars in benefits than it takes in. But the Trust Fund is large enough to cover full benefits until at least 2042 and maybe longer. After that date, Social Security will only be able to pay about 75 percent of benefits unless changes are made.

Remember that Social Security can never literally go broke—payroll taxes (currently 12.4 percent, split between employee and employer) will continue to be collected to pay benefits.

What you heard "A flood of retiring baby boomers will overwhelm the system, so younger workers will never get their guaranteed benefits."

The real deal

Granted, huge numbers of Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) have begun to retire, and they'll live longer than retirees of past generations. But the government has been planning for this demographic bubble for decades. In fact, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan headed a commission that in 1983 recommended hiking the payroll tax to its current level of 12.4 percent—in part, because it was deemed important to build reserves (that Trust Fund, again) to support retiring Boomers.

If we want to guarantee Social Security benefits to younger workers after the Boomers head off to their cabanas, what will it take? Not as much change as you may think. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office says that Social Security could pay out full benefits for the next 75 years with a tax increase of less than one-quarter of the hike we made in the 1980s. Other options include raising the amount of income subject to the Social Security payroll tax. (At present, workers pay no Social Security taxes for any earnings above $89,000.)

What you heard "Social Security earns so little interest that you'd do better with a private account so you could invest on your own."

The real deal

Advocates of private investment accounts frequently note that, historically, stocks have returned about 7 percent annually. The Social Security Trust Fund in 2003 earned 6.5 percent interest, with extraordinarily low risk.

Dozens of studies have shown that individual investors underperform the stock market as a whole—and even if you could match the market's return, you'd be left holding the bag if your retirement was slammed by a bear market.

Moreover, the expenses charged by financial firms to manage private accounts will eat into the returns. The private accounts proposal most likely to be favored by President Bush assumes expenses of 5 cents on the dollar. In Chile and Great Britain, where the government instituted private retirement savings accounts, expenses soared to about 15 cents on the dollar. Social Security keeps those checks rolling out with administrative fees of under a penny on the dollar.

You won't know for years how well your investments pan out, but one thing's for certain—private accounts would require slashing the guaranteed benefits of future workers by as much as 40 percent. How lucky do you feel?

What you heard "Social Security pays such a modest benefit that no one could really count on it to live on anyway."

The real deal

The sad truth—many do.

Two-thirds of beneficiaries receive more than one-half of their income from Social Security. For one-fifth of retirees, Social Security represents their only source of income. Without it, nearly half of the elderly would fall into poverty.

Moreover, Social Security assists others besides retirees. It pays benefits to workers who become disabled and to spouses and dependents of disabled or deceased workers.

All the more reason to make sure any changes to Social Security don't threaten society's most vulnerable.

PHOTO: COMSTOCK IMAGES

Vision Quest

WHAT'S YOUR IMAGE OF LIFE AFTER THE CLASSROOM? WHETHER YOU DREAM OF GLOBE-TROTTING OR JUST TAKING LIFE AT YOUR OWN PACE, YOU NEED A PLAN. WE ASKED NEA-RETIRED MEMBERS WHO LEAD PRE-RETIREMENT WORKSHOPS FOR THEIR STATE ASSOCIATIONS HOW TO STAY ON TRACK FOR RETIREMENT, NO MATTER HOW YOUNG OR OLD YOU ARE. THEIR ADVICE:

Get your financial house in order

Most experts say you'll need to have about 80 percent of your current annual pretax income to make ends meet during retirement. Your pension and Social Security (for those who qualify) will serve as the foundation, but you'll have to pull the remainder from sources such as savings.

That's why you should check into whether your employer offers a tax-deferred supplemental retirement savings program, such as a 403 (b), and take advantage of it if you can.

"The earlier you can begin saving the better, even if it's only a little bit," says Connie Wittig, who conducts pre-retirement workshops for the Arizona Education Association-Retired. She started putting $10 from each paycheck into a tax-deferred annuity in 1969, increased it whenever she got a raise, and ended up with "a very nice contribution to our nest egg" when she retired in 1996.

Scale up your activism

Since state legislatures usually wield considerable power over things like pensions and the health insurance premiums paid by retirees, the benefits that will await you when you retire 10, 20, or 30 years from now often are on the line today. "Teachers are starting to realize that—like it or not—they have to become politically active to protect their retirement benefits," notes Bob Scalzo, who taught in Danbury, Connecticut for 37 years.

Last year, members of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) pushed for a constitutional amendment to ensure that the state's pension fund would be 100 percent funded. Scalzo and other CEA activists came close to getting the provision passed, but, in the end, it didn't. They'll be right back fighting for a new bill again this year, he says.

So be prepared to collar your local lawmakers or blast them a few e-mails to keep your benefits intact.

Imagine the possibilities

Getting ready for retirement isn't only about money issues. What do you intend to do with yourself once you're no longer rushing out the door each weekday morning?

"It's really important to ask that question so that you don't end up feeling lost," says Gloria Holland Smith, a former English teacher in the Salem-Keizer school district who runs Oregon Education Association-Retired workshops on preparing for the emotional side of retirement.

At her workshop, participants sketch out the skills they'd like to use more in retirement (such as public speaking), discuss their fantasy vacations (hiking across Australia or going on a jungle cruise), and ponder whether to downsize their home or move from city to country. "It's figuring out what those dreams are and understanding that, if you're going to do it, now is the time," says Smith. "You're not going to want to wait 20 years."

Brace yourself for ups and downs

Wittig, formerly a school secretary in the Paradise Valley Unified School District in Phoenix, Arizona, was five years away from her scheduled retirement when she got an unexpected offer. The district was dangling an incentive package that would allow her to retire four months later with no reduction in benefits. Time to reserve a poolside chair and fire up the hibachi, right?

Instead, she languished. "I had a terrible time the first two years," says Wittig. "I simply wasn't ready to retire emotionally. I hadn't really prepared for what it meant to be apart from those wonderful little kindergartners and the staff, and the separation was so difficult. Everyone I wanted to play with was still working."

You may be able to avoid similar emotional turbulence if you...

Start to broaden your horizons now

Wittig suggests that, while they're still active, teachers and education support professionals begin exploring other interests off the school campus.

"Try to discover something new that you'd be interested in," says Wittig. "Get involved in activities—it may mean learning a new language, or volunteering in a hospital, or getting more involved in a church," she says. "Do these as an initial first step, and it will give you a sense of what you may or may not want to do after you retire."

To learn more about the benefits of NEA-Retired or pre-retirement workshops, contact your state Association.

PHOTO: JIM ARBOGAST

A Push for Private Accounts

The debate over what really is the most effective approach is now spilling onto the national stage, but with this twist: Would private retirement accounts within Social Security work any better than defined-contribution plans?

Retired teacher Barbara Snyder doesn't think so.

Snyder was born in Denison, Iowa, in 1935—the same year President Franklin Roosevelt signed the landmark retirement "safety net" into law.

After a long career teaching in Iowa, Florida, Alabama, and Tennessee, Snyder's now drawing Social Security benefits of about $900 a month, while continuing to work as executive director of the Tennessee Retired Teachers' Association (TRTA). And she's waging a determined fight so that younger workers can look forward to a similar, guaranteed benefit when they retire.

"Social Security was designed as a social insurance program, and it's been very effective that way," says Snyder. As for reports of Social Security's long-range financial challenges (see page 27), Snyder says, "There are ways to keep it solvent without doing anything drastic."

But drastic aptly describes the proposed changes that President Bush and supporters in the anti-tax and corporate crowd have in mind for Social Security. Bush kicked off a campaign in January to convince Americans—especially youngsters like Moss and Pestolesi—that Social Security is destined for oblivion, and that the program needs to allow workers to invest their own money. "If you're 20 years old, in your mid-20s, and you're beginning to work, I want you to think about a Social Security system that will be flat bust, bankrupt, unless the Congress has the willingness to act now," Bush said at a forum on Social Security.

Leaked details of Bush's plan indicate he'd push for severe cuts to Social Security benefits by proposing that future benefits be tied to increases in the cost-of-living, rather than increases in wages. (Wages typically rise faster than the cost-of-living.) Worse still, Bush's insistence on privatizing Social Security with the addition of individual investment accounts means additional cuts to the benefits you can expect when you call it quits.

Under the plan Bush is using as a model, a worker who is 45 today could expect cuts to his guaranteed benefit of 15 percent, according to an analysis by Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. A 35-year-old could expect a benefit cut of about 25 percent, and a 15-year-old just entering the workforce would have her guaranteed benefit cut by almost 40 percent, Baker found.

And how big a perk is that private investment account?

The rough details of Bush's plan are that workers born after 1950 would be able to divert up to 4 percent of their payroll taxes into an individual account, beginning in 2009, and invest in stocks and bonds.

Although it's possible workers could make up the benefit cut through astute investing, the odds are stacked against them.

By their very nature, private investment accounts generate administrative and management fees far beyond the costs of traditional Social Security. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the annual cost of an average mutual fund that received 2 percent of a worker's taxable earnings would, over the course of that worker's lifetime, result in a 23 percent reduction in the size of the resulting nest egg. Social Security's costs, by contrast, would reduce the balance by only 2 percent.

Moreover, the introduction of private accounts would require financing the current system while the system of private accounts gets up-and-running. Costs of transitioning to the new system could reach a trillion dollars or higher in 10 years and inflate the federal deficit, experts say.

In a nutshell: you'd struggle to get a benefit as good as they get today, and Social Security itself would be weakened.

NEA members are lining up to oppose Bush's plan. Snyder's been spreading the word to TRTA members about the importance of keeping Social Security safe, and she has also e-mailed or personally talked to three members of Congress from Tennessee. And she's hardly alone. More than 30,000 members have expressed their opposition to privatizing Social Security by signing a petition at www.nea.org/lac/socsec.

There's no time to waste, says John Jensen, a Nebraska retiree and former president of the National Council on Teacher Retirement. "The next six months will be crucial," he says. "If we can't step up and stop it right now, it will be doubly hard next year. And if we lose guaranteed retirement benefits, it will be nearly impossible to get them back." nea

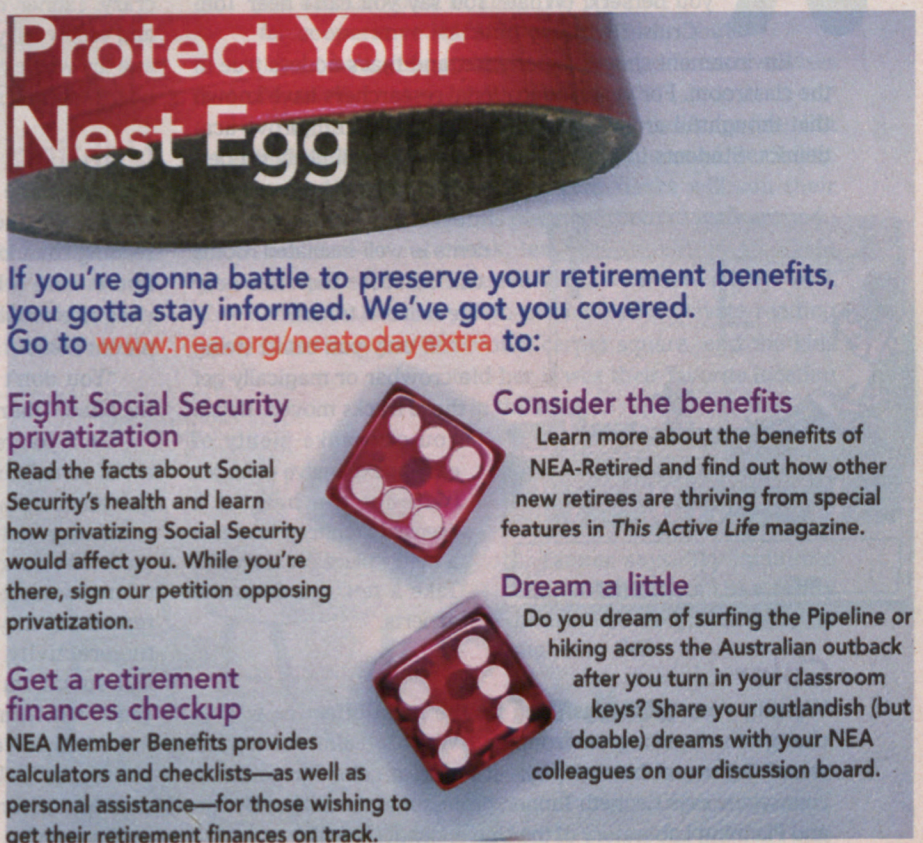

Protect Your Nest Egg
If you're gonna battle to preserve your retirement benefits, you gotta stay informed. We've got you covered. Go to www.nea.org/neatodayextra to:
Fight Social Security privatization
Read the facts about Social Security's health and learn how privatizing Social Security would affect you. While you're there, sign our petition opposing privatization.
Get a retirement finances checkup
NEA Member Benefits provides calculators and checklists—as well as personal assistance—for those wishing to get their retirement finances on track.
Consider the benefits
Learn more about the benefits of NEA-Retired and find out how other new retirees are thriving from special features in This Active Life magazine.
Dream a little
Do you dream of surfing the Pipeline or hiking across the Australian outback after you turn in your classroom keys? Share your outlandish (but doable) dreams with your NEA colleagues on our discussion board.

PHOTO: HARRISON EASTWOOD

CLASSROOM Cool

Appearances do make a difference, according to a host of experts who study the connection between classroom aesthetics and academics.

BY MARY ELLEN FLANNERY

Hospital green makes you uncomfortable. Your windowless office gets you downright depressed. A ringing cell phone in the movie theater drives you berserk. (What? You say you can't hear Tom Cruise?!)

Environment shapes experience, and that's no less true in the classroom. For years, educational researchers have known that thoughtful architecture and aesthetics can improve academics. Students in a windowed classroom will likely do better than peers laboring under fluorescent lights, and students in well-insulated rooms will outscore the ones near the railroad tracks.

If only you could swing a crowbar or magically get those tracks moved. Relax. You can make plenty of easy, inexpensive changes (without the help of a licensed architect) to create a better place for learning. Take a few tips from the experts.

Color

Wetting your paintbrush can be the most effective way to change the learning environment. Want to calm down your teens? Try a cool blue or pink—it's a great color for guidance counselors, says Kenneth Tanner, professor at the School Design and Planning Laboratory of the University of Georgia.

Prefer to activate their brains? Go for earth tones or warmer colors—say, a soft yellow—shown to increase respiration rate, heart action and, most important, brain activity. (But don't go crazy, Tanner warns. Consider McDonald's, where bright red and yellow tell you to "eat fast and run along.") If you can't manage the whole room, reserve your efforts for around the marker board where a slightly darker hue will demand attention.

Lighting

Consider these research results: In California, students in classrooms with the most daylight improved 26 percent faster in reading than kids from the least-lit rooms; in Seattle, daylight hours were a better predictor of student performance than class size or whether the student came from a single-parent home.

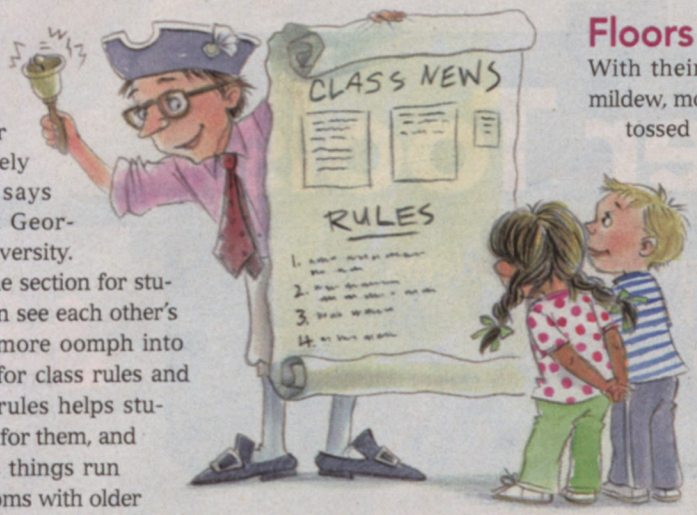
"You don't have to do anything but raise the blind," Tanner says.

Or, if you're boxed in, make the most of existing light with a few mirrors, but make sure students aren't blinded by glare. Try to avoid cool-white fluorescent lamps; reports say they increase hyperactivity. Look to full-spectrum fluorescents, which have been linked to fewer dental cavities, as well as better student attendance and achievement.

ILLUSTRATIONS: AMY WUMMER

Walls

If the classroom is your "kingdom," then the walls can deliver your royal wishes as effectively as ye olde town crier, says T.C. Chan, professor at Georgia's Kennesaw State University.



Chan recommends one section for student work—when kids can see each other's efforts, they put a little more oomph into their own—and another for class rules and daily activities. Posting rules helps students share responsibility for them, and a visible schedule makes things run efficiently even in classrooms with older kids. A third space may be designated for "promotions"—such as the school newspaper and mascot—that remind students they're part of a learning community.

Don't be afraid to display "beautiful things" even if they're not directly related to instruction, Chan says. When their environment is attractive, students take it to heart. He likes to see a few ferns or philodendrons. But instead of testing your own brown thumb, have your students do the watering.

Letting students help with classroom displays can boost their self-esteem, says Lorraine Maxwell, an associate professor in Cornell University's College of Human Ecology.

When she studied groups of kindergartners at the same school—some in classrooms where everybody's work was displayed, plus their photographs, birthdays, and height—the ones who participated in the "personalization" of the room had better self-esteem, which can lead to better academic performance, she says.

But avoid clutter, which can be distracting, and make sure you're using current materials, stresses Maxwell. In interviews with students, kids told her they don't want to see old stuff—if the Earth's layers were explored a month ago, take down the old poster. One boy reported his classroom was an "inviting place" because it was neat and clean and "up-to-date...it's as if [my teacher] cares."

Also, get down on your knees before tacking up. "See what eye-level is to your students," Tanner suggests.

Floors

With their propensity to stain, stink, and mildew, most carpets have been rolled up and tossed out. But tile can mean trouble too. Without a woolly muffler, your 30 third-graders—try as they might to use quiet voices—sound like a circus.

Noise distracts your students and makes it difficult for them to concentrate on you and their lessons. To dampen the din, try these items: area rugs, bulletin boards, soft wall-hangings, felt pads or tennis balls under chair and desk legs, and a corner sofa. Also consider limiting use of the pencil sharpener.

Temperature

Can your students hear when their ears are buried in a turtleneck sweater? Whether it's too hot or cold can be the most important factor in your classroom. If you control the thermostat, keep it set between 68 and 72 degrees Fahrenheit.

Desks

Before you slide a single desk, think about what kind of teaching you do. Are you a lecturer? Do you prefer cooperative learning groups? Next, think about how your space serves your preference, advises Maxwell.

If you lecture all day, then rows of desks are fine. But if you prefer cooperative learning, you need flexibility. Many teachers find groups of four desks will suit their needs—just make sure there's plenty of room to walk around.

In addition to each desk, teachers should try to create personal space for their students. Maxwell saw a New York City school where every fifth-grader had a private reading spot, sometimes just their own carpet square, and the kids told her it was their favorite location in the school.

A comfy couch and corner lamp for reading also can create a homey atmosphere that makes kids comfortable, Tanner says. Try including "home artifacts" like teddy bears and soft blankets, he suggests. nea

For More

For links to classroom aesthetic resources and research, go to www.nea.org/neatodayextra.

Power Tools

'Assistive technologies' help students with special needs keep pace in the regular classroom.

BY KAREN NITKIN

Not so long ago, Justin Litke never would have had a chance to join 24 other eager and energized kids in Jane Throndson's third-grade classroom at Fernbrook Elementary School in Osseo, Minnesota.

But thanks to a power wheelchair and a special computer station, the 9-year-old with cerebral palsy and a winning smile gets along just fine. Because Justin has difficulties performing tasks requiring fine motor skills, such as writing on paper with a pencil, he usually types on his own Mac computer, hunting and pecking away with one finger. He motors around the classroom using the power wheelchair, which he operates with his left hand.

SEE

HEAR

LEARN

Without these supportive technologies, "I don't think Justin would have been able to keep up with the curriculum, and he would have needed to be pulled from class," says Ann Litke, Justin's mother. "With the help of technology, I see him going to college and being able to live really independently."

Known as assistive technologies, tools such as touch-screen computers, voice recognition or "talking book" software and the like, are showing up in more and more general education classrooms like Throndson's. Some of the impetus comes from changes in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandating that schools provide appropriate accommodations (such as assistive technologies) to allow students with disabilities to attend regular education classes. Using the new technologies, some students who would not even have been placed in regular classrooms are not only present—they're also participating in the curriculum and the camaraderie.

But teacher and staff training and collaboration are vital to making the technologies work.

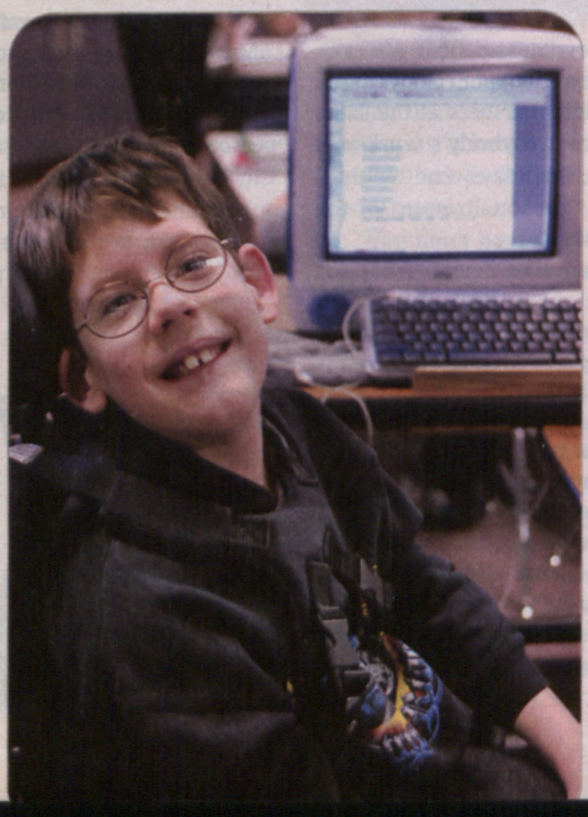
Throndson says she felt pressure to succeed with Justin—without taking anything away from the other kids in the class—before the school year even started. "I was so nervous, thinking, I have never had this type of a disability in my class," she says.

Fortunately, she got lots of help—from professionals like special education teacher Kelly Bredeken and paraeducator Carla Buckholtz. Before the school year started, Throndson met with Bredeken, who helped her set up the seating so Justin could maneuver his wheelchair easily around the classroom and participate in group tasks with other children. And she turned his desk into a computer station, so he could tap out his assignments on his keyboard while other kids write them on paper.

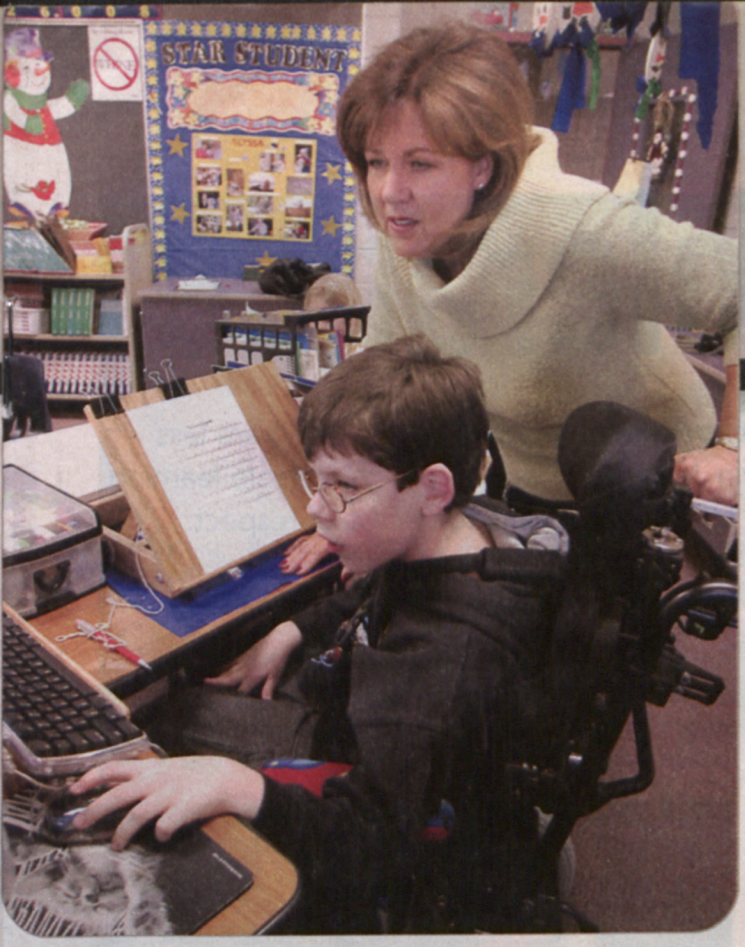
Throndson also learned to make day-to-day adjustments so that Justin, who has no cognitive impairments, can keep up with the other 24 students in the class. If students are editing sentences, she'll type Justin's sentences directly into his Mac ahead of time, giving him a few more minutes to work while other kids copy from the board. For creative writing assignments, though, "I just leave him on his own," says Throndson. "It takes him a little longer to produce as much but he's an extremely good reader, so when the other kids are finished reading, he'll just go back to his story."

"He's a very capable young guy," adds Bredeken. "And that's why technology is so important to him. It gave him a method in which he can demonstrate his knowledge of curriculum."

Like Throndson, Ellen Budish, a kindergarten teacher at Sunrise Park Elementary School in Boca Raton, Florida, has a child in her class using an assis-



Third grader **Justin Litke,** who has cerebral palsy, takes a break from a writing assignment.



Third-grade teacher **Jane Throndson** says she felt pressure to succeed with Justin, and adds that support from colleagues has been critical. Justin's classmates are learning that "he's very smart" and that "there are ways you can work around a disability."

tive technology. In her case, Danielle uses a DynaVox, a device resembling a touch-screen computer that provides a voice for children who can't speak. It's easy to use so that even Danielle, who has limited use of her arms, can manipulate it.

Before school started, Budish attended an all-day seminar in a school system office to learn about the technology and how to incorporate it in her classroom. About 30 teachers, paraeducators, and parents attended.

Budish works closely with Colleen Fritts, an augmentative communication specialist, to customize the program for Danielle. Fritts knows that teachers can be intimidated by the devices. "They're usually scared," she says.

But once that nervousness is overcome, the results can be magical. "Ellen is a fantastic kindergarten teacher," Fritts says. "She takes her job extremely seriously, and she wants to do her best for every single student in the classroom. It truly is a success story."

The commitment is just as strong in Throndson's classroom. With adequate support, Justin is making strides. And his classmates benefit from his participation, too—even if they sometimes envy his computer.

"The children are learning from him too," says Throndson. "They are seeing that...he's very smart and there are ways you can work around a disability."

"We're very fortunate to have him," she adds. "He brings us a lot of joy." nea

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LEARN MORE about how to make your curriculum more accessible to all students—for free.

While supplies last, get a copy of NEA's Accessible Classroom Primer CD-ROM. Click away on the CD-ROM and you'll find articles and presentations on assistive technologies and universal design for learning strategies.

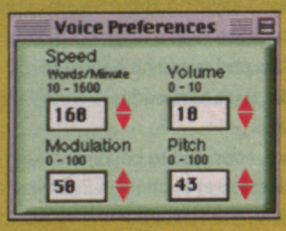
You can request a copy from gapsinfo@nea.org. Or save time by downloading the material yourself from www.cte.jhu.edu/accessibility/primer.

The Next Frontier?

Say you're completely clueless when it comes to directions or just interested in the fastest way to get from Point A to Point B. You know you've got alternatives: You can dig out your wrinkled map, log onto a Web site like MapQuest, use a GPS-operated map system in your car to view or hear spoken directions, or, as a last resort, stop and ask the guy at the gas station.

Advocates of a concept known as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) think kids learning math, reading, or other subjects should have similar options.

UDL proposes that curriculum materials be designed so that students with quite different learning needs—even students who have visual or hearing limitations, cognitive disabilities, or who speak English as a second language—can access and learn the content. Instead of the teacher adapting the curriculum to meet such a wide range of learning needs, the materials themselves would have built-in ways for kids to learn the same lessons.



It may sound farfetched, but UDL advocates say they're addressing a critical flaw with most instructional materials—they simply aren't accessible for some of the diverse students most teachers now find in the classroom. After all, points out Skip Stahl of the nonprofit Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), even the common textbook is useful only "as long as you can turn the pages and see the print and extract meaning from the print."

UDL's precepts are beginning to influence the design of instructional aids such as texts or Web sites. For example, CAST has developed an eReader that makes text more accessible to struggling readers and students with disabilities. The eReader adds spoken voice, visual highlighting, and document or page navigation to any electronic text. So kids who use the reader can read text on screen, but they also can hear words spoken out loud.

UDL principles, combined with the trend toward providing necessary assistive technologies to students with disabilities, "move schools closer to providing an equitable education to all students," says Patti Ralabate, NEA's senior professional associate for special needs.

PHOTOS: JANET HOSTETTER

Teaching Tolerance

It's academic: Kids harassed for 'being gay' miss school days, get lower grades, and are less likely to go to college. Former history teacher Kevin Jennings is working to create safe learning environments for all children—and that starts with teaching students the ABCs of respect.

At a time when 84 percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) teens endure verbal abuse because of their sexual orientation and nearly 40 percent have been physically harassed, Kevin Jennings knows much work still must be done to create safe learning environments for all students. But as co-founder and executive director of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), Jennings, a former history teacher, is working to ensure that "every child learns to value and respect all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity." Through more than 2,500 high school clubs known as Gay-Straight Alliances, GLSEN empowers students and educators with the skills and resources they need to stop anti-LGBT bullying, work that earned Jennings an NEA Human and Civil Rights award last year. Jennings speaks with *NEA Today*'s Kristen Loschert about the issues gay students face and ways educators can make a difference.

"IT'S NOT A QUESTION of teaching kids to approve of homosexuality. It's about teaching young people to respect people who are not like them, to teach students of different backgrounds and different value systems how to coexist in a respectful and peaceful way."

—KEVIN JENNINGS

Why did you start GLSEN?

JENNINGS: I sort of came out in sixth grade, but like a lot of kids who get harassed for "being gay," it wasn't anything about my sexuality that prompted the harassment. It was because I was a boy who did his homework and paid attention in class and raised his hand and did all the things boys weren't supposed to do. I was harassed relentlessly through my junior high and high school years.

When I graduated from Harvard, I decided to become a teacher. I was pretty much forced out of my first job at a school in Providence, Rhode Island, because I was gay. And when I went to my second job I had a gay student who was really struggling. I saw how miserable he was and I saw how my own staying in the closet was kind of conveying to him a very damaging message that this is something to be ashamed of, something to hide.

I made a little promise to myself right there, and said, "I will do whatever I can so that the next generation has it better than we had it." So, I started GLSEN.

Have schools become any more accepting of gay educators?

JENNINGS: Yes, I think things have improved. However, there's still a lot of fear among a lot of gay people that they are going to be targeted unfairly if they go into professions that work with young people. There are only 14 states in which it's illegal to fire someone from their job because they're gay and only eight in which it's illegal to harass or

discriminate against students because they are gay. So, while there's been more social acceptance, legally there is still an enormously long way to go before we have even basic protections in place.

Why has harassment of LGBT students been tolerated for so long?

JENNINGS: Primarily because nobody has ever told young people it's wrong. And sadly, according to our National School Climate Survey, in 83 percent of cases where students are harassed because of their sexual orientation, teachers rarely or never intervene.

I'm not saying teachers are the problem. I'm saying the system does not prepare the teachers to succeed. If you don't give them the policy support, if you don't give them the training they need, you're really leaving them to their own devices. And that's a recipe for disaster.

Are schools of education preparing future teachers to handle these issues?

JENNINGS: We have found very few teacher education programs that address these issues in any way. And when they do, it is at the discretion of individual instructors and is not woven into the curriculum. So we continue to send teachers out there who have no training, trying to figure it out on their own.

At the same time, the average LGBT high school student comes out

PHOTOS: GLSEN

Teachers can make a huge difference when it comes to preventing anti-LGBT bullying, says **Kevin Jennings,** executive director of GLSEN.

Numbers Speak as Loudly as Words

More than 91 percent of LGBT students say they hear homophobic slurs or expressions frequently or often. **91**

Nearly 58 percent of LGBT students have had property stolen or deliberately damaged at school. **58**

More than 64 percent of LGBT students say they feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation. **64**

Roughly 37 percent of LGBT students do not feel comfortable discussing LGBT issues with their teachers. **37**

Source: GLSEN 2003 National School Climate Survey

between 15 and 17. So they're coming out in school systems that have no more policies than they did when I was in high school, with teachers who have no more training. And then we're surprised when four out of five of these kids report that they routinely experience physical or verbal or sexual harassment. What did we think was going to happen?

Visibility is a mixed blessing. The great thing about visibility is yeah, now kids have gay-straight alliances. They know they're not alone. The bad thing is that when you're more visible, you're a bigger target.

How does the harassment affect students?

JENNINGS: We know that students who are subjected to frequent harassment have demonstrably lower grade point averages—almost a full letter grade. We also know that they are much more likely to skip school. Over 31 percent of LGBT students have skipped at least one day of school in the past month because they are simply too afraid to go.

What can educators do to create safer learning environments for their LGBT students?

JENNINGS: Supportive teachers make a big difference. When LGBT students know there's a teacher on their side, their grade point averages are a full letter grade higher. Meanwhile, those who do not have supportive teachers are two-and-a-half times more likely to say they don't plan to go to college.

When we polled teenagers to understand why they use homophobic language and what could get them to stop, 80 percent of girls and 68 percent of boys said that if a teacher they respected told them to stop using the language that would have a major impact on them. Teachers can make a huge difference. So, if you see something happening, do something. The worst thing to do is to say nothing because what you're doing is giving tacit permission for that behavior to continue.

On the proactive side, think about how you can work this into your classroom in age-appropriate and educationally appropriate ways. If you're teaching younger ages and putting together a unit on families, for example, acknowledge that some families have two moms or two dads.

It's not a question of teaching kids to approve of homosexuality. It's about teaching young people to respect people who are not like them, to teach students of different backgrounds and different value systems how to coexist in a respectful and peaceful way. That to me is just as essential as reading, writing, and arithmetic. nea

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For more on GLSEN's work, as well as curriculum and educator resources for addressing LGBT issues, visit **www.glsen.org.** For more on sexual orientation issues and their impact on students and school employees, visit the NEA Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Caucus site at **www.nea-glc.org.**

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Teaching 9/11

Award-winning curricula go beyond the terror to explore America's place in the world.

How do you teach about September 11? It's a difficult subject, and it comes early in the school year, leaving teachers little time to prepare when they come back in the fall. But some educators have found creative ways to handle the anniversary.

Like life on Earth, **Bob Peterson's** lesson on world inequality begins with the luck of the draw. Students choose a continent, which determines whether they get enough cookies to get fat on, or just crumbs.

For Milwaukee fifth-grade teacher Robert Peterson, and for University of Massachusetts Professor David Mednicoff, the anniversary of the terrorist attacks is a good time to teach about the role of America in the world. Both received awards last year from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History for the 9/11 curricula they developed.

Peterson recalls that after the 2001 terrorist attacks and the dramatic scenes that played repeatedly on television, his students had so many questions that it became clear to him that education after September 11 demanded a new approach.

"One or a series of lessons would not be sufficient," says Peterson. He does not dwell on the events of that day, but instead uses the attacks "to help students understand that they live in a global village."

Peterson is an editor at *Rethinking Schools*, a teacher-run journal on social issues in the classroom. He also teaches at a two-way bilingual school, La Escuela Fratney.

Peterson's 9/11 curriculum is intended to help children express emotions, ask "why?" and develop empathy for other people in the world. In one lesson, he leads the children in a study of world population and distribution of income, and then takes them outdoors to illustrate their research on a large world map drawn on the playground blacktop. With each child representing 240 million people, the kids spread out—15 students in Asia, three in Europe, three in Africa, one in North America, two in South America, none in Australia.

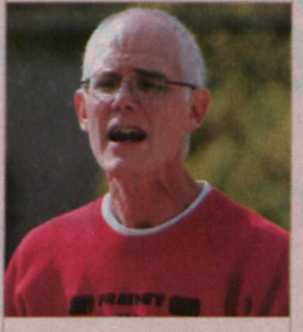
Chocolate cookies are then distributed according to each continent's gross domestic product.

Six cookies are shared by the 15 people in Asia. Nine are shared by three Europeans, one cookie for South America, just half a cookie for Africa, eight for the lone North American.

Most students have strong reactions and many questions. Why are there so many people in Asia? Why are the Europeans and Americans so rich?

Some try negotiating with other "nations," while others even suggest war to even the odds. Peterson says his students begin to glimpse how the world's enormous inequalities could lead to animosity.

Social awareness is familiar ground for Peterson, who teaches such topics as "Sweat Shop Math" to illustrate child



labor in the third world while strengthening his students' math skills. "When kids get engaged in social justice issues, it enlivens the classroom," he says.

Like Peterson's students in Wisconsin, Mednicoff's college students were not just alarmed by the terrorist actions, but deeply puzzled about why some people hate America. Students in his "Explaining Terror" course for juniors and seniors were surprised by what they learned about the pattern of Western involvement in the Middle East and by the range of opinions held by others around the world about the events of September 11. Mednicoff encouraged his students to keep journals about their reactions to post-9/11 world events and invited them to suggest new American policies toward the Middle East.

Are these classroom experiences unusual? Or have recent world events encouraged other social studies teachers to take a closer look at America's place in the world in their classes?

Mednicoff thinks the latter is happening. "September 11 was very much a wake-up call," he says. Students are much more interested in world events than they were a decade ago, and the demand for courses about the Middle East has increased. At the same time, public institutions are struggling for funds to expand international studies.

But Peterson is less optimistic about changes in social studies teaching, noting that social studies is very textbook driven and that teachers must go out of their way to find more relevant teaching resources.

He adds that "with the increasing pressures of No Child Left Behind, there's less emphasis on social studies. It's all but eliminated. The focus is on math and reading to prepare for testing."

—SANDRA GREGG

FOR MORE on how Peterson and Mednicoff teach 9/11 and related topics, visit: www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/sept11/ and www.courses.umass.edu/mes491n/index.html.

PHOTOS: PETER ZUZGA

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'S' is for Stuff They Know

School bus drivers need a new credential to stay on the road—and NEA will help them get it.

When Gloucester Township (New Jersey) school bus driver Bonnie Chalfant outlines the complexity and responsibility of her profession, you could be listening to an airline pilot. Before Chalfant even pulls out of the bus yard each day, she has literally kicked all six tires, done a pre-trip inspection of her vehicle (Wipers? Fluid? Exterior Lights? Defroster?), and inked a detailed checklist that will be scrutinized by state inspectors.

On and on go the procedures: a mandated dashboard-gauge check 10 minutes into the trip, a correct way to approach railroad crossings and bus stops, and a safe method to load and unload passengers. Each time Chalfant approaches a bus stop, she must simultaneously watch for illegally passing traffic, blind spots, balls, and, of course, small children near her wheels.

And, while an airline pilot eyeballs each and every arriving customer, Chalfant must know the *name* of each passenger, ensure that he or she sits in an assigned seat, and interrogate the crowd if one young face is missing. All in all, it's a job requiring nerves, "especially in bad weather," notes this 24-year veteran of the road.

The new "S" endorsement for school bus drivers is nothing to fear. It just proves what ESPs already know about vehicle and child safety.

Until now, Chalfant and colleagues across the nation have needed a commercial driver's license (CDL) with a "P" endorsement (for passengers) to do what they do so professionally. That requirement was ratcheted up with the passage of the federal Motor Carrier Safety Improvement Act of 1999, which created a new "S" endorsement for transporting school children. All school bus drivers must receive this credential by October 1 of this year.

Every applicant for an "S" endorsement must demonstrate, through a written assessment and road test, knowledge of topics such as passenger loading/unloading, emergency evacuation procedures, railroad crossings, pre-trip inspections, and driving skills appropriate to one of three types of vehicle.

Fortunately, until September 30 the federal law allows states

to waive the road skills test for drivers who hold valid CDLs, who currently drive the vehicle type they seek to operate with the "S" endorsement, and who have had a good driving record for the past two years.

But there's *still* that written assessment to pass by October 1, something that makes some folks jittery. "There's no need to be fearful," stresses New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) UniServ rep Joe Murphy. "Anything you're tested on is what good transportation professionals already know and do for quality and safety."

Chalfant, who's president of the Gloucester Township Support Professionals (GTSP), couldn't agree more, but she and 119 other township drivers are leaving nothing to chance.

In partnership with district transportation supervisor George Bittner, Chalfant and GTSP head rep Ernie Hertler created a driver assessment preparation program last fall, complete with study groups, team captains, one-on-one help, and practice tests.

It seems to be working: As of late January, 76 Gloucester drivers had already passed the written state test. One key to success: cooperation, not competition, among drivers and study groups. "In New Jersey, the word on the street is that we 'have to work together' to succeed," says Murphy.

Soon that word will spread across the country. With a $20,000 NEA grant, NJEA has re-created the Gloucester Township experience in a high-quality video that features the initial labor-management planning discussions, the study group sessions, and visual tips on bus loading/unloading and pre-trip inspections. NEA will distribute this video, accompanied by a training package, to every state affiliate. "It's a self-help tool for local Associations—you don't need a UniServ rep to do this training," emphasizes Murphy.

And you don't need a UniServ staffer to put the big question to your district. "Don't be afraid to ask what they intend to do about getting their drivers endorsed," advises Chalfant, a member of the NEA Board of Directors. "Jump on it—don't let it go. You need to get this done as soon as possible."

For more on preparing for the "S" endorsement, contact NEA ESP Quality staffer Lisa Connor at lconnor@nea.org.

—DAVE WINANS

More ESP stories in this issue:

- **Vermont ESPs bargain a whopping raise** – *Page 14*
- **Retired Delaware nurse wins lifetime disability** – *Page 19*
- **Fighting for education employee retirement benefits** – *Page 20*

PHOTOS: NATHAN HAM

Should teachers let failing students pass by doing an 'extra credit' assignment?

YES

As teachers, we're stuck between a rock and a hard place at the end of each term when students, parents, and even our colleagues are all sending us the message that we should just let students pass. And high-stakes testing is making it harder and harder for teachers to pass a student who obviously does not have the required skills.

But the other side of high-stakes testing is that it makes our students feel even more like they are just numbers, not individuals. Sometimes, to "leave no child behind" means we must look carefully into each student's life to find the best way to educate that student.

Several days ago a senior in one of my AP classes came in to thank me. Last term, I allowed her to make up a number of late assignments and receive some extra credit in order to pass. She had been absent a lot because she had to find a second job when she was kicked out of her house. I pushed back every deadline and gave her more chances than I normally offer. She finished, barely.

It's true that I was not as accommodating for a student whose main excuse for absences was a snooze button, but even that student began getting calls from me at 6:30 a.m. You do what you can, when you can.

I rarely take late work. I push hard for kids to learn that deadlines are part of a real job, and most bosses won't care if you're having a bad day. My father owns a business and employs a number of high school students. Being a good student usually translates into being a good employee, whether it's showing up on time ready to work or following through with orders even when that takes extra time. I always feel responsible for teaching students those skills through deadlines and due dates.

But I also know that a student's well-being and individual needs must come first. In life, we must hope that someone will cut us some slack, not all the time, but once in a while when we are really desperate.

JULIE BARLOW is an English teacher and yearbook advisor in Layton, Utah.

NO

Every year, when the leaves turn and the coats come out of storage, the barrage of phone calls, e-mails, and parent conferences start. Although grades have been communicated numerous times during the semester, all now want to know, "What can my student do to pass the class?"

Most often, I don't hear in these conferences "study," or "complete the work," but those two words "extra credit." There is much pressure from administrators, student, parents, and, yes, even from other teachers to pass students.

The students who ask me for extra credit usually are those who didn't work or perform during the grading period. Extra credit implies that additional work was completed beyond what was assigned. But I have taught in schools where students received extra credit for wearing a tie every Friday, attending a basketball game, and attending school plays.

I do have students who sometimes need me to cut them some slack—usually one or two a semester, who have a long illness or serious family problems. I talk with them and we agree on how soon they will make up their work.

But extra credit given as the semester ends because the student would not work in class is different. Sometimes the parents have never been heard from, even after being notified that the student was not working.

The extra credit activity that students want most is the "report." One year, I taught a senior who missed 25 days of my class. When the student's father confronted my principal, the principal asked me to let the student write a report and give enough credit so the student could pass. I refused, so my principal had another teacher do it. That student should have received the "F" that was earned.

With "No Child Left Behind" and other high-stakes tests, why would a teacher let a student pass with extra credit? Will you take the blame when students pass your course but fail the test?

DANA CAMP teaches high school chemistry in Fayetteville, Georgia.

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

Should teachers let failing students pass by doing an 'extra credit' assignment?
To vote, visit our Web site at www.nea.org/neatoday and see the results instantly.

Is retention better than social promotion for students?
The tally on this *NEA Today* Debate question:
76% Yes 24% No

Are programs that teach students how to take standardized tests worth the time?
If you'd like to take part in this future Debate, send a brief note to Alain Jehlen, ajehlen@nea.org.

ILLUSTRATION: TED PITTS

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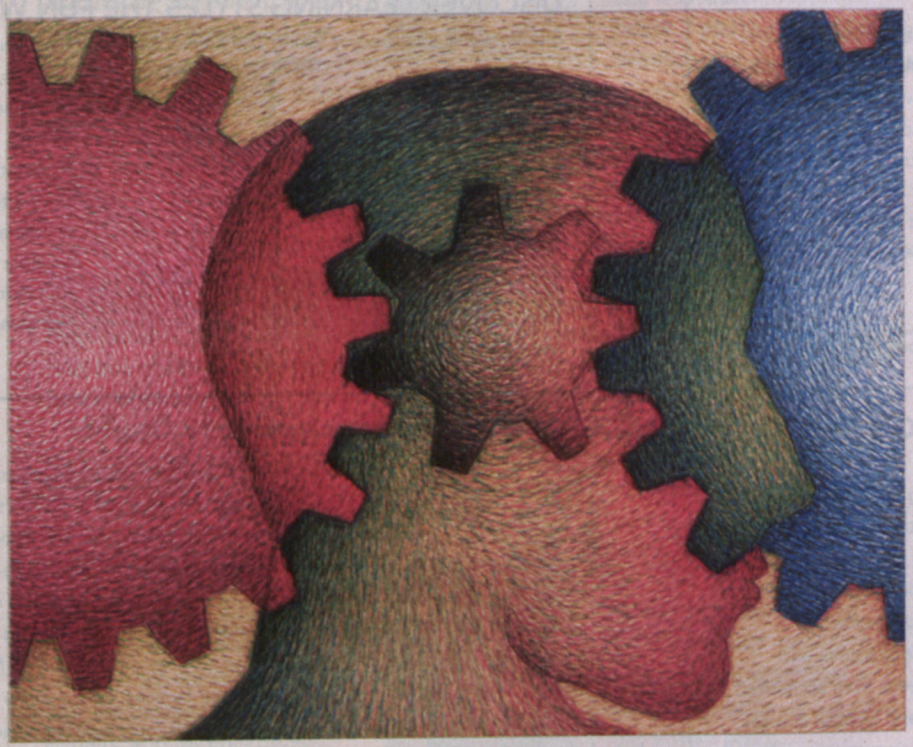
Smarter by September

Get Your Brain in Shape

BY SHEREE CRUTE

Summer's almost here and it's time for the ultimate hot weather shape-up: a total workout for your beautiful mind, *not* your body. This plan gives new meaning to the concept of summer school—you don't have to go near a classroom, but each day, you dedicate at least 30 to 60 minutes to toning up your flabby memory and adding speed and agility to your cognitive skills. The goal: to be sharper by September, no matter what your stage of life.



Now, even if you think your old gray matter just ain't what it used to be, cast aside your doubts and embrace your brilliant future. "Scientists have let go of the idea that brain power peaks at age 5," says Paul Nussbaum, a neuropsychologist at the University of Pittsburgh and author of *Brain Health and Wellness*. Nussbaum is referring to the once common notion that we maxed out our intellectual potential by the time we were potty trained. "The brain is very flexible," Nussbaum asserts. "We're able to learn throughout our entire life span."

"The basic idea," says Lawrence Katz, a professor of neurobiology at Duke University, "is that your brain has many untapped pathways." By stimulating those pathways in new ways, you can increase the number and size of the brain's synaptic connections—its key electrical circuits. "An enriched environment," Nussbaum explains, contributes to ongoing neurogenesis (the growth of new brain cells or neurons) in adults and strengthens many of the brain's supportive structures. Added benefits include staving off dementia and the foggy thinking many see as an unavoidable part of old age.

Best of all, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to learn to think clearer and faster. All it takes is a willingness to change, a little work, and some common sense. The steps here will teach you how to create your own enriched environment—a world in which you can easily improve your mind every day. Lots of these tips can also be adapted to the classroom because young minds respond to the same stimuli. Improvement will be gradual but definite. Come fall, you just may find yourself whizzing through complex tasks with ease!

1 REDISCOVER YOUR INNER TODDLER. This is an important reminder for adults who simply forget how to play, says John J. Ratey, a professor of psychiatry at Harvard and author of *The User's Guide to the Brain*. If you have a friend who teaches kindergarten, visit, get down on the floor, and play with the kids. "Go out with friends," says Ratey, "but do something you never do." Challenge the dog to Frisbee; dig the board games out of the closet. Make humor and laughter a part of your life. Your mind thrives on positive, happy experiences.

2 TURN OFF THE COMPUTER. Yes, computer games are engaging, but the mind hates isolation. "The most novel stimulus for the brain is other people," says Katz. "Our highly automated society reduces this interaction." The solution? Talk to the corner grocer, chat with the dry cleaner, go to lunch with a crowd, or find other activities that bring you into contact with a wide variety of folks.

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID RIDLEY

3 MIX IT UP. After examining the latest neurobiology research, Katz created Neurobics. "These are activities that use the natural world and your five senses to keep your brain agile, help your information-processing speed keep up as you age, and improve your overall cognitive function," explains Katz, author of *Neurobics: Keep Your Brain Alive*. To begin, write down what you do every day, suggests Nussbaum. Then look at each activity and ask: Is this novel, challenging, or complex? If not, figure out how you can make it that way.

4 PLAY BEETHOVEN...BADLY. Or learn the violin at 60. "Do something you stink at," suggests Nussbaum. Your sour notes may drive the dog under the bed, but you'll actually be building neuro-circuits as you squeak and plunk along.

5 TALK WITH YOUR HANDS. Learning a new language is a great way to stimulate the mind, but learning sign language is the best stimulus of all. Try learning a few signs each day.

6 BECOME AMBIDEXTROUS. Shave, brush your teeth, style your hair, even apply make-up with your non-dominant hand a few mornings a week. Take up knitting or salsa. Basically, activities that use both sides of the body make your mind work harder.

7 SWITCH SENSES. Close your eyes and find your keys with your sense of touch, rather than sight. Shower with your eyes closed and find the tap or soap by touch only.

8 STOP AND SMELL THE PEPPERMINT. Place a small jar of aromatic herbs—mint, thyme, lavender—near the phone. Sniff it when you dial a new number. See if another whiff helps you remember the number.

9 BE A ROAD WARRIOR. When traveling abroad, rent a car, figure out roads, and explore small towns where you don't speak the language. At home, change your route to work often.

10 EXPLORE. If you teach math, spend the summer studying the Middle East or Shakespeare. Just make sure it's something you know little or nothing about.

11 WORK THE BODY/MIND CONNECTION. Research has found that aerobic exercise is "miracle grow" for the brain. Try to get at least one hour a day. Exercise not only affects blood flow (25 percent of the blood from every heart beat goes to the brain), it also causes the release of neurotransmitters. Also good for the brain: karate, tai chi, and yoga.

12 ADD MUSCLE TO YOUR MEMORY. Practice memorizing lists of unrelated words, or visualize things, then try to recall the image and name later in the day.

13 AND REPEAT. Repetition actually strengthens brain connections.

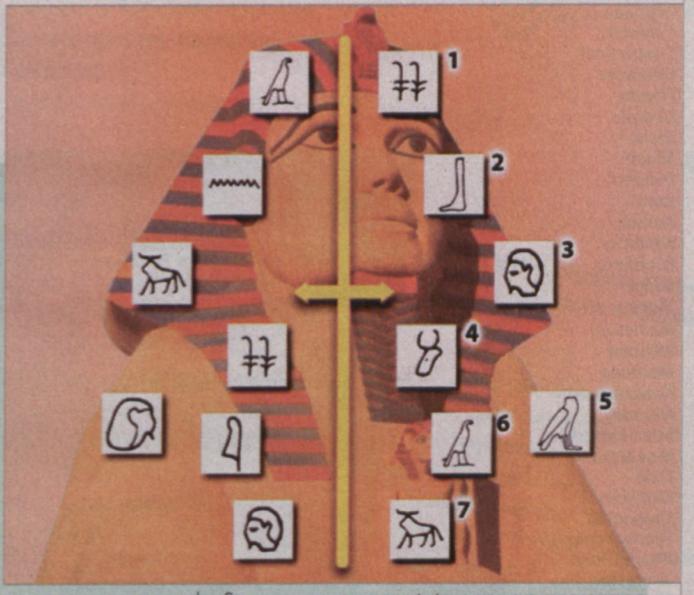
14 TRAIN YOUR BRAIN. No mental fitness program would be complete without exercises designed to stimulate specific cognitive skills. The exercises below were created by Scientific Brain Training and can be found at www.HappyNeuron.com, a Web site where some of the best experts in the business put you through a rigorous brain training program for a graduated fee.

Brain Games

Want to find out whether you're firing on all cylinders? Challenge your brain with these two fun exercises. The first is designed to test your visual sharpness, while the second tests your reasoning, concentration, and abstraction skills.

Characters

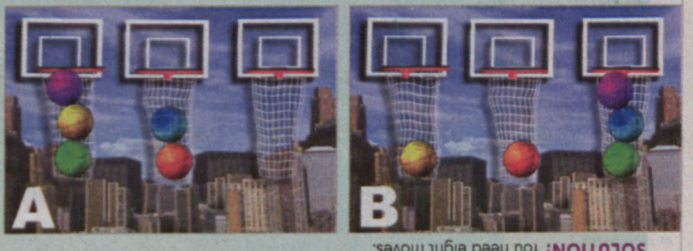
You have 30 seconds to find which characters are on the right side of the picture, but not on the left.



SOLUTION: Characters #2, 4, and 5 are not in the left group.

Basketball in New York

Mentally move the balls from position A so they exactly match position B. You may only move one ball at a time and only above the basket. Also, there cannot be more than three balls in a basket. How many moves are needed?



SOLUTION: You need eight moves.

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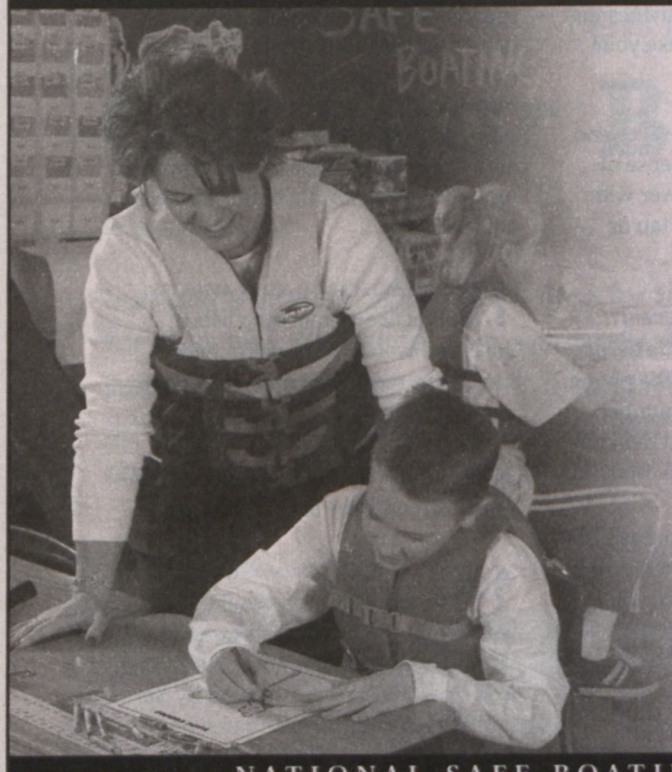
Your students will "RISE TO THE TOP"



During National Safe Boating Week (May 21-27), give your students a life-saving lesson. Rise To The Top™, an organization that promotes life jacket usage, has developed this fun curriculum to raise water-safety awareness while having some fun.

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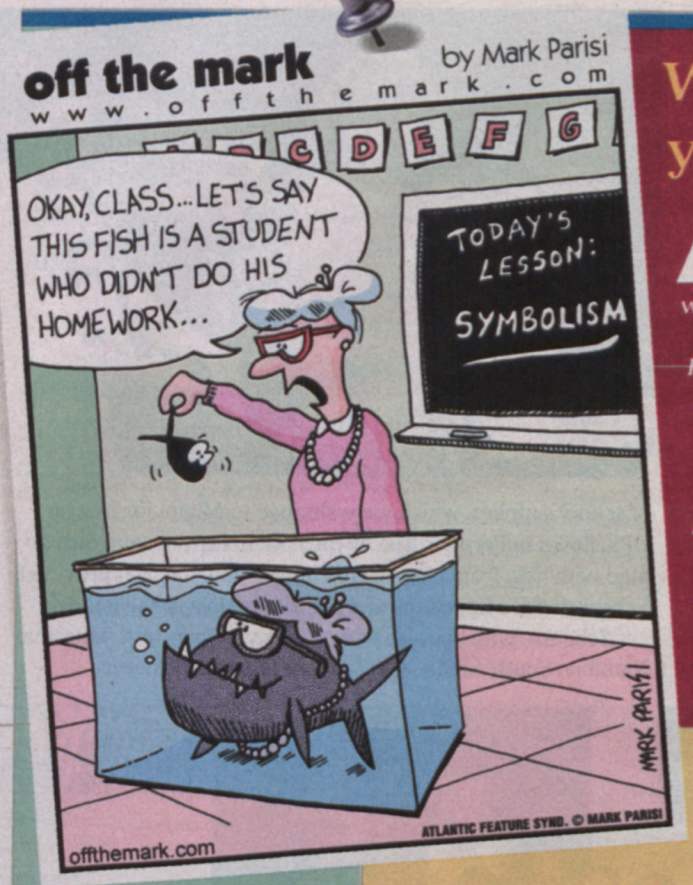
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What's the WORST mistake you've found in a textbook?

ANSWER: In a German textbook, on the map of Europe, Germany was labeled France!

KRISTIN HAASE
High school German teacher, Cheshire, Connecticut

ANSWER: In the 80s, I was teaching ESL to high school students from Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos. In the social studies text was this sentence: "The American flag is the most beautiful flag in the world."

My students were all refugees, and most appreciative of what the United States stood for. Still, it was a glaring sentence. It gave us a good chance to discuss the difference between a healthy pride in one's nation and jingoism, not to mention people's individual color and pattern preferences!

CHARLOTTE AGELL
Middle school teacher, Yarmouth, Maine

HOT Teen Books

I am a secondary English education student. Soon, I will be in the classroom trying to convince reluctant readers to fall in love with books. I would like to know what popular literature teenagers are reading and how to incorporate those books into the curriculum.

KAREN BEAN *Newport News, Virginia*

Group Punishment

I was out to dinner with some teachers and a guidance counselor, and one teacher said she had an uncontrollable class. She had told students everyone was going to be disciplined because most of them would not behave. We have all been there at one time or other. But the guidance counselor said teachers should find a way to get at only the bad students, because it leaves the good ones feeling bad. She had a point! But how can we do that? There were 12 excellent teachers at dinner and not one had an answer. Help!

DEBI MIDDLETON
Middle school social studies teacher, Chesterfield, Virginia

Western Lit

I'd like to create an elective course for juniors and seniors based on literature of the Old West—Zane Grey, Louis L'Amour, Ambrose Bierce, Jack London, and so on. Any ideas?

JIM SPRAGUE
English teacher, El Cajon, California

ANSWER: I showed an original Lone Ranger episode with the sound off. The students wrote what they thought was happening. We then discussed their ideas before I showed them the episode with the sound. I used this to introduce the writing of a wild west story with eighth-graders, but it would work well to introduce your unit to high schoolers. So, "with a cloud of dust and a hearty 'Hi-Yo, Silver,'" have fun!

MARJORIE PERRY
Middle school teacher, Mason, Ohio

Share your wisdom, ask your question!

What's the biggest surprise you've had from a former student?

Send your answers to these or other questions on this page to **ajehlen@nea.org.** Or, send us a question you'd like to see posted. Please include your name, your job, and the community and state where you work.

For a weekly e-mail of questions, answers, and practical classroom tips, join Works4Me, one of NEA's most popular and useful services. Just send the message "subscribe Works4Me" (without the quotation marks) to **Lyris@list.nea.org.**

ILLUSTRATIONS: IMAGES.COM

Extreme Teaching

Globe-trotting science teacher Bev Schaake conducts labs in the Amazon rain forest—and her seventh-graders love it.

BEV SCHAAKE takes experiential learning seriously, and no one knows that better than her seventh-grade science students.

"Instead of talking about something that's on page 29 of our textbooks, we actually get to observe the flora and fauna in its natural habitat," she says of frequent class trips to the Amazon rain forest.

Her love affair with the region began with Schaake's first trip in 1995, when she flew to Peru and spent nine days traveling along the river and hiking through the countryside. Since then, she's been back seven times, taking more than 100 of her students from Liberty Middle School in Edwardsville, Illinois, and an eclectic mix of families, college students, and adults.

Schaake always schedules a visit to a local school into every trip she leads, an experience that teaches her students a lot about the cultural and social life of their host country. When word gets out American tourists are visiting, the school often becomes a popular spot for impromptu concerts and performances.

"The mothers will drop in with their babies and the fathers will come in from the fields and sing songs. Sometimes, they'll ask us to sing and we'll sing something like, 'Take Me Out to the Ball Game' or 'You Are My Sunshine.'"

After her first trip, Schaake began thinking about what she could do for the people of the Amazon. She collected 65 boxes of school supplies, which were shipped to Miami for free by UPS, flown to Peru for free by the national airline, and distributed with help from Lions Clubs International, which provided Schaake with a boat, fuel, and a driver to deliver the goods.

Schaake, who has also been to Kenya, Botswana, Tanzania, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, says she never expected to become a world traveler. In Zimbabwe Schaake met a young girl who attended a school that had no running water or heat. Even though the child's teeth were chattering, she told Schaake how much she loved going to school.

"Education is special and truly valued in many of the places I've visited," says Schaake. "For that little girl to say she loved school was both heart-wrenching and inspirational. I guess that's why I love going places and taking people with me."

—DESDA MOSS

Top: **Schaake** and her students fish for piranha, which they later eat for dinner. Left center: Schaake crosses a canopy walkway—a series of suspension bridges strung from tree to tree high above the forest floor. Right center: Schaake visits a rural Amazonian school. Bottom: Schaake learns how to use a blowgun as Yagua villagers educate her about their lifestyle.

PHOTO TOP: MICHELLE MULLIGAN; PHOTOS BOTTOM: JAN KERSHAW

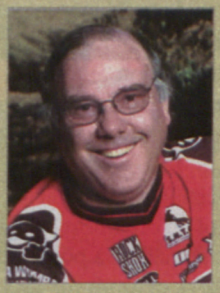
A Wild Ride

"It's kind of like running a mile, dancing a ballet, and riding a bull—all at the same time," says Tom Lamb.

NO, LAMB is not describing a new hip-hop dance move; rather, he's waxing lyrical about the sport he loves—downhill mountain bike racing. This science and environmental studies teacher from California is an expert downhill mountain biker who's currently the national champion for the 50- to 60-year-old expert age group.

Lamb—a member of Chumbawumba, a team of professional and amateur racers—competes between 10 and 15 times a year. Downhill racers compete against the clock one at a time on a rough, steep course down the side of a mountain. Each race lasts five to seven minutes and involves an elevation drop of 1500 to 2000 feet.

So how does Lamb train for this challenging sport? A former triathlete, he rides three to four times a week. To maintain his level of fitness, he trains on a cross country mountain bike for endurance and a downhill-specific bike for technique. He also does some weight training.



Lamb obviously likes a challenge, which is why he switched to teaching 10 years ago after working as a geologist for 17 years. Lamb's background serves him well at Coronado Middle School near San Diego, where in addition to physical science, he teaches students about the environment. Even though he taught community college early in his career, Lamb says it's nothing like teaching middle school. "It's an all-consuming, tough job," says Lamb, "but it's all-satisfying too."

—EMILY GOODMAN

Broadcasting Messages of Hope

Retired South Carolina member Fannie Leonard Simmons takes to the radio waves each week with information and inspiration for county jail inmates.

A FEW YEARS BACK, Simmons was saddened when she visited a relative in the Marion County Prison Camp. "I saw in prisoners' faces what confinement had done to them, and these were not faces of hope."

Simmons contacted the manager of a local radio station that broadcasts gospel music and religious programming, and he gave her the green light to create a program to serve prison inmates. Simmons' show, "Behind Locked Doors," airs Saturdays on WJAY radio in Mullins, South Carolina. Simmons reads inspirational poetry, some of which she writes, and interviews guests with advice or encouragement for inmates.

Simmons gets a chance to talk with the inmates who listen to her show when she teaches Sunday school at the jail. Many express their gratitude and ask for copies of her poems. "Making a difference for people with tough lives makes me feel better about myself," says Simmons, who also writes letters of reference for inmates when they come up for parole.

Simmons, who has had the heartbreaking experience of meeting inmates who were her former students or the children of former students, was elated last month when one of the young men she had written a letter for came up to her and said, "Mrs. Simmons, I've got good news! I made parole!"

"It's all worth it," says Simmons, "if I can help just one person."

—MATT SIMON

GOT A TIP?

Do you have an interesting story idea? Contact Sabrina Holcomb, section editor, at **sholcomb@nea.org**

PHOTO TOP: SANDY HUFFAKER; BOTTOM: DAVE ACKERMAN

A Report from NEA Secretary-Treasurer Lily Eskelsen

Lily Eskelsen

As NEA Secretary-Treasurer, I am pleased to report to you figures taken from NEA's audited financial statements for the fiscal and membership year ended August 31, 2004. Once again NEA experienced a positive year in 2003–04.

Our membership increased by an additional 18,858 members this year, and our General Operating Fund Unrestricted Net Assets increased by $1,022,698 as a result of net revenues exceeding expenses (Consolidated Net Assets increased by $1,996,120). The increase of Net Assets and continuous growth of new members add strength to our already fiscally sound organization that will enable us to build confidence in public education and to advocate for our members' needs. Each of you should be proud of your contribution in making the NEA strong and responsive to the students we serve and the people who spend their lives in public education.

The auditors' opinion letter stated that their work was performed in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards. It is a "clean opinion" issued without any qualifying comments. An unqualified opinion is the best kind of opinion letter to receive.

The Consolidated Statements of Financial Position presents the Association's assets, liabilities and net assets as of August 31, 2004. One important indicator of an organization's financial strength is the Net Assets (the difference between total assets and total liabilities). Net Assets should be a positive balance and sufficient not only to stabilize an organization in troubled times, but also to serve as a source of funds for special projects, future growth, and other fiscal demands as deemed appropriate. NEA's consolidated Net Asset Balance is now over $98.2 million. In addition, NEA has continuously demonstrated a positive Current Ratio, which means that NEA is in a solid position to meet its current obligations by using cash and other current assets.

The General Operating Fund Statement of Activity and Changes in Net Assets reflects total Revenue and Expenses by Strategic Priorities for years 2004 and 2003.

Membership growth, fiscal stability and strength, and sound allocation of NEA's resources combined to make 2003–04 an outstanding year for the National Education Association.

The chart on the opposite page shows a breakdown of how the $137.00 Active Professional and $76.50 Active ESP NEA dues dollars for 2004-05 are allocated to support and represent members and affiliates in their efforts to achieve the mission of NEA.

NOTE: A complete copy of the NEA audit report is available upon request.

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

Consolidated Statements of Financial Position By Fund at August 31, 2004, with comparative totals as of August 31, 2003

	General Operating Fund	Special Purpose Funds	Capital Improvement Fund	Consolidating Entries	2004 Total Funds	2003 Total Funds
Current Assets	$ 63,142,371	$ 29,491,914	$ 324,820	$ (1,819,923)	$ 91,139,182	$ 83,828,499
Long-term Assets	21,355,247	13,811,464	47,218,202	(5,719,921)	76,664,992	83,409,997
Total Assets	$ 84,497,618	$ 43,303,378	$ 47,543,022	$ (7,539,844)	$ 167,804,174	$ 167,238,496
Current Liabilities	$ 18,201,671	$ 8,137,755	$ 3,238,700	$ (1,819,923)	$ 27,758,203	$ 27,962,276
Long-term Liabilities	4,893,000	11,991,365	24,917,285		41,801,650	43,028,019
Total Liabilities	$ 23,094,671	$ 20,129,120	$ 28,155,985	$ (1,819,923)	$ 69,559,853	$ 70,990,295
Unrestricted Net Assets						
Undesignated Net Assets	34,126,947	23,174,258	19,387,037	(5,719,921)	70,968,321	82,672,504
Net Assets Designated for Postretirement Benefits	27,276,000				27,276,000	13,575,697
Total Unrestricted Net Assets	61,402,947	23,174,258	19,387,037	(5,719,921)	98,244,321	96,248,201
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	$ 84,497,618	$ 43,303,378	$ 47,543,022	$ (7,539,844)	$ 167,804,174	$ 167,238,496

Your 2004-2005 Dues Dollars

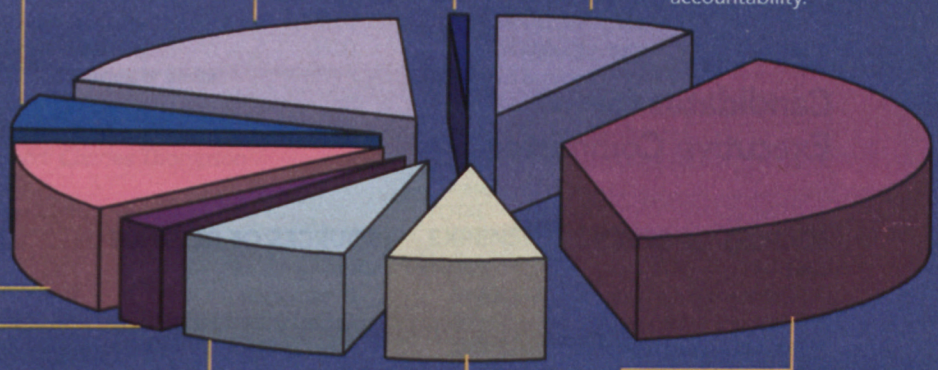
$7.30 ($4.07 ESP)
Governance
Implement an inclusive, engaged governance process that fosters member participation and democratic decision-making through such avenues as the Representative Assembly, NEA Board, NEA Executive Committee, and NEA committees and task forces.

$24.86 ($13.88 ESP)
Administrative Support
Provide a facility that includes technology infrastructure, financial services, facilities services, and human resources to serve the needs of affiliates and members.

$1.19 ($0.66 ESP)
Contingency
Provide funding for emergencies at the national, state, or local levels.

$12.13 ($6.78 ESP)
Improve Teaching & Learning
Advocate for qualified teachers and support professionals in every classroom and worksite; provide strategies for school improvement and raise student achievement through early childhood education, teacher preparation, certification and development, and research and documentation on testing and accountability.

$16.28 ($9.09 ESP)
Legal Support
Implement advocacy programs for members including the Unified Legal Services Program, Fidelity Bond, Association Leaders liability insurance, and a one million dollar member liability insurance program.



$3.20 ($1.79 ESP)
Leadership Development and Constituency Support
Provide for Regional Leadership Conferences, Minority and Women's Leadership Training, support for councils including NCUEA, ESP, Higher Education, NEA-Retired, and the NEA Student Program.

$10.55 ($5.89 ESP)
Legislative and Ballot Initiative Action
Build bipartisan support for public education that includes lobbying, government relations, a state ballot initiative and legislative crises fund, cyber lobbyists, members' education, and mobilization on political issues.

$9.78 ($5.47 ESP)
Partnerships and Public Relations
Establish new partnerships with diverse supportive organizations and businesses and outreach to family-community organizations and to minority communities. Establish NEA's public image as an advocate for great public schools through TV, radio, print, and cyber news.

$51.71 ($28.87 ESP)
Support Strong States & Locals To Protect Member Interests
Support the UniServ program, affiliate project and assistance grants, bargaining training and research on salary and benefits issues, and compensation database technology. Recruit and retain members in all categories and produce communications for members and leaders.

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

General Operating Fund — Comparative Statement of Activity and Changes in Net Assets
Year Ended August 31, 2004 and 2003

	2004	2003
Total Revenue	$ 280,081,851	$ 273,642,608
Expenses by Strategic Priorities:		
Student Achievement — Provide students with the skills and knowledge to function successfully in school	4,709,855	4,087,318
Teacher Quality — Ensure a qualified teacher in every classroom	5,504,289	5,414,486
Education Support Professional Quality — Ensuring qualified education support professionals in the classroom and at worksites	3,710,088	3,607,113
Quality School Systems — Build learning environments that support student success	6,859,297	6,276,911
Public, Parental, and Business Support — Promote stronger public, parental, and business support for public education	41,407,090	42,971,818
Membership and Affiliate Support — Mobilize at the local, state, and national levels for the resources basic to quality schools	132,223,142	126,881,930
Administrative Services and Program Support — Provide the administrative and programmatic support vital to the achievement of NEA's goals	84,645,392	81,379,340
Total Unrestricted Expenses	279,059,153	270,618,916
Changes in Net Assets from Operating Activities	1,022,698	3,023,692
Unrestricted Net Assets, Beginning of Year	60,380,249	57,356,557
Unrestricted Net Assets, End of Year	$ 61,402,947	$ 60,380,249

Final Reports of Campaign Revenues and Expenses

NEA Standing Rule 10.E provides as follows:

Campaign Expenses. No portion of dues money collected at the local, regional, state, or national level shall be used to promote the candidacy of any individual for an NEA office.

Using forms provided by the Committee on Constitution, Bylaws, and Rules, each candidate shall file a preliminary report of campaign revenues and expenses, including projected revenues and expenses, with the committee prior to the opening of nominations at the Representative Assembly. A final report, on the forms provided by the committee, must be filed with the committee no later than thirty (30) days following certification of the election results. The committee shall report to the Representative Assembly, prior to any nominations or elections, whether any candidate has in any manner violated the election rules and regulations. The final report of campaign revenues and expenditures shall be printed in an appropriate NEA publication for inspection by any member.

The following reports were filed in a timely manner and are printed pursuant to Rule 10.E.

Candidates are listed below by office and by alphabetical order within each office.

Candidates for Executive Committee

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$13,404.19
Groups within the state	0
Persons outside the state	3,316.00
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	19,582.70
Donations in kind	0
TOTAL	$36,302.89

EXPENSES

Printing	$11,067.39
Mailing	167.00
Other media materials	3,374.00
Hospitality and entertainment	2,689.00
Campaign Committee expenses	3,724.50
Giveaway(s) if any	15,105.00
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	76.00
TOTAL	$36,202.89

Signed: Mark Cebulski

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$8,463.00
Groups within the state	1,150.00
Persons outside the state	1,530.00
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	2,170.12
Donations in kind	30.00
TOTAL	$13,343.12

EXPENSES

Printing	$6,491.76
Mailing	412.10
Other media materials	90.00
Hospitality and entertainment	319.70
Campaign Committee expenses	967.93
Giveaway(s) if any	1,779.02
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	373.10
TOTAL	$10,433.61

Signed: Rebecca Pringle

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$450.00
Groups within the state	0
Persons outside the state	2,510.00
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	2,500.00
Donations in kind	2,000.00
TOTAL	$7,460.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$5,000.00
Mailing	1,000.00
Other media materials	500.00
Hospitality and entertainment	1,000.00
Campaign Committee expenses	1,500.00
Giveaway(s) if any	2,000.00
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	2,000.00
TOTAL	$13,000.00

Signed: Michael Marks

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$8,242.00
Groups within the state	3,205.00
Persons outside the state	4,747.00
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	5,420.00
Donations in kind	2,540.00
TOTAL	$24,154.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$8,924.00
Mailing	1,808.00
Other media materials	2,695.00
Hospitality and entertainment	2,612.00
Campaign Committee expenses	8,612.00
Giveaway(s) if any	200.00
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	2,115.00
TOTAL	$26,966.00

Signed: Rosemary Riley

Candidates for NEA Director, ESP At-Large

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$140.00
Groups within the state	575.00
Persons outside the state	0
Groups outside the state	185.00
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Donations in kind	0
TOTAL	$900.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$715.90
Mailing	30.00
Other media materials	530.00
Hospitality and entertainment	245.00
Campaign Committee expenses	210.00
Giveaway(s) if any	0
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
TOTAL	$1,730.90

Signed: Janis Eggert

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$ 0
Groups within the state	213.00
Persons outside the state	25.00
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Donations in kind	0
TOTAL	$238.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$285.00
Mailing	0
Other media materials	0
Hospitality and entertainment	0
Campaign Committee expenses	0
Giveaway(s) if any	0
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
TOTAL	$285.00

Signed: Arthur Goff

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$20.00
Groups within the state	0
Persons outside the state	0
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Donations in kind	0
TOTAL	$20.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$25.00
Mailing	0
Other media materials	0
Hospitality and entertainment	0
Campaign Committee expenses	30.50
Giveaway(s) if any	0
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
TOTAL	$56.06

Signed: Dardon Ann Hayter

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$200.00
Groups within the state	0
Persons outside the state	0
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	300.00
Donations in kind	0
TOTAL	$500.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$200.00
Mailing	150.00
Other media materials	400.00
Hospitality and entertainment	0
Campaign Committee expenses	0
Giveaway(s) if any	0
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	250.00
TOTAL	$1,000.00

Signed: Veronica Henderson

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$1,210.00
Groups within the state	1,145.00
Persons outside the state	0
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Donations in kind	0
TOTAL	$2,355.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$785.00
Mailing	72.32
Other media materials	48.59
Hospitality and entertainment	752.09
Campaign Committee expenses	362.91
Giveaway(s) if any	200.00
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
TOTAL	$2,220.91

Signed: David Hockaday

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$850.00
Groups within the state	2,450.45
Persons outside the state	0
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Donations in kind	0
TOTAL	$3,300.45

EXPENSES

Printing	$1,644.64
Mailing	22.20
Other media materials	643.41
Hospitality and entertainment	39.28
Campaign Committee expenses	1,170.06
Giveaway(s) if any	26.00
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
TOTAL	$3,545.59

Signed: Charles Thompson

Candidates for NEA Director, Higher Education

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$100.00
Groups within the state	0
Persons outside the state	0
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Donations in kind	0
TOTAL	$100.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$20.00
Mailing	0
Other media materials	20.00
Hospitality and entertainment	0
Campaign Committee expenses	100.00
Giveaway(s) if any	0
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
TOTAL	$140.00

Signed: Susan Williams Brown

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$40.00
Groups within the state	0
Persons outside the state	0
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Donations in kind	0
TOTAL	$40.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$ 0
Mailing	25.00
Other media materials	20.00
Hospitality and entertainment	0
Campaign Committee expenses	0
Giveaway(s) if any	0
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
TOTAL	$45.00

Signed: Herb Germann

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$0
Groups within the state	847.00
Persons outside the state	0
Groups outside the state	500.00
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
Donations in kind	0
TOTAL	$1,347.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$692.48
Mailing	306.22
Other media materials	50.00
Hospitality and entertainment	0
Campaign Committee expenses	496.73
Giveaway(s) if any	0
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
TOTAL	$1,545.43

Signed: Theresa Montaño

Candidate for NEA Director, Administrator

SOURCES OF REVENUE

Cash	
Persons within the state	$50.00
Groups within the state	0
Persons outside the state	0
Groups outside the state	0
Income from raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	280.00
Donations in kind	300.00
TOTAL	$630.00

EXPENSES

Printing	$213.10
Mailing	18.50
Other media materials	199.00
Hospitality and entertainment	0
Campaign Committee expenses	248.00
Giveaway(s) if any	0
Raffles, lotteries, or similar fund-raising activities	0
TOTAL	$678.60

Signed: Mike Buckner

resources

52 **Grants & Awards** Funding for in-depth, long-term arts education experiences.
53 **NEA's Read Across America** A new season of Get a Kick Out of Reading begins.
54 **In Print** Give your soul a lift with a collection of writings from activists and leaders.
54 **Books by NEA Members** A school counselor offers children of divorced parents a way to discuss their feelings.
55 **Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits** Keep those interest rates low with home equity loans.
56 **On TV** A new series examines how scientists use advanced technology to reveal the secrets of the jungle.
57 **Diversity Calendar** Celebrate your school library during National Library Week.
58 **Take Note** Spring is here and it's time to get outdoors for some environmental education.
60 **On the Web** Commemorating discovery with an online exhibition on Lewis & Clark.
60 **What's Up at HIN** A guide for schools on helping students with diabetes succeed.

The NEA Foundation June Grant Review

DO YOU HAVE A BIG idea for an innovative classroom project or professional development experience that will improve student achievement and help you and your colleagues grow and learn?

NEA members just like you have applied for and received over 1,500 grants throughout the years in all subjects, including the arts, literacy, science, and technology. Read about recently funded projects at www.neafoundation.org, and then submit your own idea.

ThinkBIG!
THE NEA FOUNDATION

Could you use a grant of $2,000 or 5,000 to bring your idea to life? The NEA Foundation's *Innovation Grants* and *Learning & Leadership Grants* can help.

Apply by **June 1** for Innovation Grants and Learning & Leadership Grants and you will be notified by November 15. Applications are accepted on an ongoing, year-round basis, so proposals received after June 1 will automatically be included in the next review cycle. Grants fund activities for 12 months from the award date.

All members who are practicing U.S. public K–12 school teachers, education support professionals, or higher education faculty and staff at public colleges and universities are encouraged to apply.

Applying for a grant is easy, so why wait? Visit www.neafoundation.org today for more information on The NEA Foundation's grant programs, including guidelines and an application, or call 202-822-7840.

ARTS EDUCATION GRANTS

Learning in the Arts for Children and Youth grants from the National Endowment for the Arts offers funding for projects that support in-depth, curriculum-based arts education experiences that occur over an extended period and that help K–12 students acquire appreciation, knowledge, and understanding of, as well as skills in, the arts.

Projects must provide participatory learning and engagement of students with skilled artists, teachers, and excellent art. Projects also must ensure the application of national, state, or local arts education standards. Only school districts and state and regional education agencies are eligible; no money is awarded directly to individual elementary or secondary schools. Schools may participate as partners in projects for which another eligible organization applies. For more information, go to www.arts.gov/grants/apply/Artsed.html. The grant application deadline is **June 13, 2005.**

SCHOOLS AS CENTERS OF COMMUNITY

Each year KnowledgeWorks Foundation searches across the country for excellent schools that successfully model the growing trend to build schools as centers of community. The top selected school, chosen by a panel of national experts receives the Richard W. Riley Award for Excellence and a $5,000 grant. The panel also selects

ILLUSTRATIONS AND PHOTO: GETTYIMAGES

several schools with innovative design elements and initiatives to be members of the Schools as Centers of Community Honor Society and be part of the National Search Web site.

For more information, see the National Search Web site at www.nationalschoolsearch.org. Submissions will be accepted until **June 24, 2005.**

HONORING YOUNG HEROES

The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes seeks nominations for its 2005 Awards. The Barron Prize honors young people ages 8–18 who have made a significant positive difference to people and our planet. Each year, 10 national winners each receive $2,000 to support their service work or higher education. This year's nomination deadline is **April 30.** For more information and to nominate, visit www.barronprize.org/.

GRANTS FOR GRAPHIC ARTS

The Graphic Arts Education and Research Foundation (GAERF) offers full grants and mini-grants for education projects that promote careers in graphics arts and communications. Graphic arts educators, institutions, and students may apply. Full grants may include standard grants that fund one-year projects; teacher conferences, which are funded for specific one to two-week periods and are normally held in the summer months; and continuing grants for a specific time period and level of support with a statement of intent to provide additional support of the project.

The deadline for submitting applications for full grants is **May 30** of each year for funding beginning on January 1 of the following year. Mini-grants may be submitted at any time during the year. GAERF awards up to four $2,500 mini-grants per year. For more information, including detailed grant guidelines, go to www.gaerf.org/grants/grant.html.

PHYSICS POSTER CONTEST

To mark Einstein Year and the World Year of Physics, Science Across the World encourages students ages 10–16 years to create their own colorful posters to show how physics and physics applications have a positive impact on their everyday life. Posters should be self-explanatory, in A3 format (42 x 29.7 cm), and can be submitted on paper or electronically in .doc, .pdf, .gif, .jpg, .ppt, or .htm formats.

All posters must be submitted by **May 31, 2005.** Send paper copies to Science Across the World, The Association for Science Education, College Lane, Hatfield, Herts. AL10 9AA, United Kingdom and electronic copies to saw@ase.org.uk. Short-listed entries will be displayed at "Beyond Einstein: Physics for the 21st Century" in Bern, Switzerland July 11–15, 2005, where an international panel of judges will select a winner and runners-up. Prizes include digital cameras for students and digital cameras and a year's membership in the Institute of Physics for teachers.

For more, go to www.scienceacross.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=content.showcontent&node=374.

SCHOOLYARD HABITAT GRANTS

The National Wildlife Federation administers a grant program for teachers interested in developing a schoolyard habitat. The $250 grants may be used to establish a new schoolyard habitat or to add components to established habitats.

Applications are accepted (year-round) by the first of the month and money is awarded by the third week of the month. For more information, visit www.nwf.org/schoolyardhabitats/pdfs/wsfapplication2005v2.pdf.

Read Across America is 'Where it's Hat!'

Read Across America Day may be over but the mission of NEA's Read Across America continues. With April comes Major League Soccer's 10th season and a new season for Get a Kick Out of Reading/Leer y Marco Un Golazo, the bilingual reading partnership between NEA and Major League Soccer. Go to www.getakickoutofreading.org to see the brand new site and meet the new Read Team Leaders. And don't forget to take part in Youth Service Day, April 17. The Youth Leaders for Literacy Grant Winners will also be celebrating. Check out the winners at www.nea.org/readacross.

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In Print

OVERCOMING THE DARKNESS

Give your heart and soul a lift by reading Paul Rogat Loeb's *The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear,* a collection of beautifully written essays and stories chosen to inspire. Writings from activists and leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Arundhati Roy, Marian Wright Edelman, and Vaclav Havel give concrete examples of people overcoming despair—political, spiritual, social, and ecological—through community involvement, compassion, and hope. 422 pp. $15.95 from Basic Books. For more information, go to www.theimpossible.org.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY GUIDE

Computer Resources for People with Disabilities, from the Alliance for Technology Access, serves as a guide to what technology and resources are available for people with disabilities.

The latest edition includes real-life examples, updates on technologies, contact information for support organizations and vendors, worksheets to help users develop an assistive technology plan, and a "technology toolbox" to help people match technologies to their abilities and goals. Though not specifically geared toward education, this highly readable guide would be a good resource for schools, parents, and anyone in need of assistive technology. 396 pp. $24.95 from Hunter House Publishers. To order go to www.hunterhouse.com or call 800-266-5592.

LOOKING GOOD

Pinduli's mother tells her she is a beautiful hyena, but the other animals just make fun of her, saying that she has funny ears, a scraggly mane, and the wrong stripes. Little Pinduli just wants to disappear. But in an effort to fit in, she triggers a surprising chain of events. From Janell Cannon (author of

BOOKS BY NEA MEMBERS

DIVERSE DIVORCE

By Lisa Lawmaster Hess

Children with divorced or separated parents need to realize they are not alone. This book assumes the voices of 18 kids of different cultures as they experience the changes and chagrin brought by divorce. These situation stories address hefty issues (adjusting to stepparents, financial difficulties) that children of divorce might encounter, and each story includes follow-up discussion questions and activities. The author, a school counselor, gears sections toward both young and older children, keeping stories simple without sugar-coating divorce's downside. For grades 1–8. 128 pp. $19.95 from Marco Products. To order, call 800-448-2197 or visit www.marcoproducts.com.

A TALE OF TWO TAILS/EL PERRO CON DOS COLAS

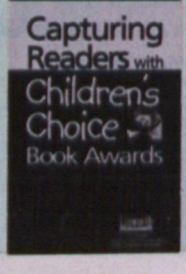
By Mariana Donahoe

Written by a second-grade teacher, this book depicts the adventures of a young girl and her unique dog Sidney. Although initially dismayed about being different, Sidney learns that having two tails makes her twice as special. Written in both English and Spanish, this tale will bring smiles in either language. The book also features a bilingual glossary and discussion questions. Jeff Byrd's lively illustrations help bring the author's memorable characters to life. 44 pp. $14.95 from One Arm Publishing. To order, go to www.onearmpublishing.com.

CAPTURING READERS WITH CHILDREN'S CHOICE BOOK AWARDS

By Beverly J. Obert and Patty Barr

Written for librarians by a school librarian and a library system consultant, this guide provides a state-by-state list of the must-have children's books. This collection is the end product of the annual Children's Choice Book Awards, a program designed to let children nominate and choose those special stories that have classrooms abuzz across the country. Information on implementing awards programs in schools is also included. 182 pp. $39.95 from Linworth Publishing, Inc. To order, call 800-786-2017.



BYTE ME

By Ron S. Tuitt

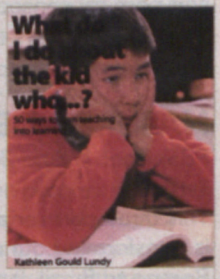
The Internet's role in the classroom seems to be growing by leaps and bounds every day. To better navigate cyberspace and use it as the ultimate teaching aid, former journalist and current elementary educator Tuitt developed this helpful guide to the World Wide Web. Sorted by subject, this comprehensive handbook provides brief blurbs on 2,000 different sites suitable for preK–8 classrooms. Because the Internet is always changing, free updates will be provided to purchasers of the book on a quarterly basis. 210 pp. $17.95. To order, e-mail titansrst@yahoo.com.

Stellaluna) comes *Pinduli*, an entertaining story about accepting who you are set in the east African savanna. 48 pp. $16 from Harcourt. To order, visit www.harcourtbooks.com.

MAN'S BEST FRIEND

In *Dog Show*, a droll story for young readers by Elizabeth Winthrop, Harvey sets his hopes high, sure that his dog Fred will win an award. By the show's end, however, Fred hasn't won anything. Fred doesn't care, but to make Harvey happy, this inventive and loyal dog comes up with a plan to win both he and Harvey a prize. 24 pp. $15.95 from Henry Holt and Company. To order, visit www.henryholtchildrensbooks.com or call 888-330-8477.

REACHING HARD-TO-REACH STUDENTS



Developed by veteran educator Kathleen Gould Lundy, *What Do I Do about the Kid Who...? 50 Ways to Turn Teaching into Learning* helps educators create communities of learning in which the needs of all students are identified and dealt with in an encouraging manner. The book provides helpful hints and effective activities to turn the classroom into a positive and participatory environment. While applicable for grades 4–12, the activities are designed for those hard-to-reach students who require a little extra care. 112 pp. $20 from Stenhouse Publishers. To order go to www.stenhouse.com.

WHEN DATING TURNS VIOLENT

Young-adult librarian Patrick Jones pens *Things Change*, a novel that addresses the often hushed subject of dating violence. Written for teenagers as a gripping, cautionary tale, the story follows perfectionist Johanna's relationship with life of the party Paul. The high school students' romance takes a turn for the worse as Paul begins to take out his frustrations on Johanna through physical violence. Yet Johanna risks her own safety by staying with him. To get out of the destructive relationship, she must learn to put her own happiness first. 224 pp. $16.95 from Walker & Company. To order, visit www.walkeryoungreaders.com.

MORE THAN ONE WAY TO FLY

Since Tomasito's spinal cord never fully formed, he must use a wheelchair to get around. After his family moves, he has to explain this over and over again to the other kids. His father gives him a bird as a present, but the bird can't fly. But when Tomasito is given a chance on a soccer team, he learns that despite their challenges, he and his bird can find other ways to fly. Author Juan Felipe Herrera writes the heartwarming *Featherless/Desplumado* in Spanish and English for elementary school readers. 32 pp. $16.95 from Children's Book Press. To order, visit www.childrensbookpress.org.

Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits

WHY HOME EQUITY LOANS ARE SO POPULAR

The vast majority of homeowners use home equity loans (or lines of credit) to pay for home improvement projects or to consolidate bills. Some use them to buy new cars or to pay tuition. Regardless of how the money is used, the interest is usually tax-deductible (check with your tax advisor), which makes them a smart choice for a lot of people. And the interest rates are generally lower than most other kinds of consumer credit.

If you're interested in finding out how a home equity loan or line of credit can work for you, call the NEA Home Financing Program at 1-800-NEA-4-YOU (1-800-632-4968). To learn more about home equity loans online, visit www.neamb.com/loans/hmfheq.jsp.

CAR RENTAL TIPS TO ENSURE A SMOOTH RIDE

Driving an unfamiliar vehicle can bring its own set of challenges, so if your travel plans include renting a car, review these vehicle safety tips from the National Safety Council:

- Examine your auto policy and credit card provisions to see if they provide supplemental car rental insurance coverage.
- Familiarize yourself with all the knobs, levers, and buttons on the car's dashboard, including the turn signals and horn, so you will know their locations and if they work.
- Check the trunk to make sure you have a viable spare tire and jack.
- Bring along your infant or toddler car seat if you need one, or check ahead of time to see if the car rental company can provide it for you.
- Find out about the car rental agency's emergency road service provisions.
- Do a "once over" of the car's interior and exterior, and report any dents, scratches, or other damage found before you leave the lot.

Check out the discounts and exclusive privileges offered to NEA members through the NEA Car Rental Program®. Call 1-800-637-4636 or visit www.neamb.com/discount/carpge.jsp. Have a great trip!

LAST YEAR, NEA MEMBERS DROVE NEARLY 8 MILLION MILES WITH THE NEA CAR RENTAL PROGRAM.

On TV

MTV NEWS PRESENTS—AFTER THE TSUNAMI

MTV, April 4 and 18 (Part 1) and April 11 and 25 (Part 2), 4 a.m., ET. Check local listings.
This two-part program explores the impact and aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, including aid missions, the scope of the damage, visits with survivors, and more. The 30-minute shows can be taped and used in the classroom for one year.

THE BROOKE ELLISON STORY

A&E, April 5 and 6, 7 a.m., ET, check local listings.
On her first day of middle school, Brooke Ellison was hit by a car, became permanently paralyzed from her neck down, and was forced to breathe with the help of a ventilator. Brooke's local school, however, does not want her back, in part because she needs a full-time nursing aide, necessitated by her immobility, her tracheotomy, and her cumbersome wheelchair with its portable ventilator. Brooke's mother steps in, becoming Brooke's nurse and helper during Brooke's school years. Brooke's hard work in high school earns her a spot at Harvard University, and Harvard in turn accepts the challenge of housing Brooke and her mother and providing the scholarship support she needs to study there. While her college years are full of ups and downs, Brooke manages to graduate summa cum laude. Directed by Christopher Reeve, this story is not upbeat or sanitized; the parents are shown as tired, the siblings in shock, and the family's finances are nearly in ruins. And while her mind is sharp and her spirit strong, Brooke's body is barely functional, indeed, she must be turned every two hours to avoid the kind of pressure sores that caused Christopher Reeve's death. For more information, go online to www.aetv.com/brookeellison and www.brookeellison.com.

TLC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Learning Channel, April 8, 6 a.m., ET, check local listings.
"Liftoff Into Space" examines the history of rockets, weightlessness, what makes the Sun rise and set, and humankind's fascination with Mars as part of a series designed for grades K–6 that consists of segments edited from original documentaries. The episode can be taped and used in the classroom for two years with teaching materials at www.discoveryschool.com.

BIOGRAPHY—DOW AND JONES: WIZARDS OF WALL STREET

A&E, April 11, 7 a.m., ET.
This documentary profiles the two men behind the stock index and explains how the Dow Jones works. Teaching materials can be found at www.aetv.com/class.

IN THE MIX—SEX: EVERYONE'S DOING IT, NOT!

PBS, April 16–23, check local listings for times.
This special is aimed at raising awareness among teens that not "everyone" is having sex and that you don't have to be sexually active to be popular or in a loving relationship. Teens discuss the pressure from their peers and partners to have sex before they are ready, and the effect of the media that too often glamorizes sex as "cool" and consequence-free. Using humor and real experiences, the program shows the emotional and physical consequences of being sexually active and empowers viewers to stick by their decision to wait, providing the practical skills to resist pressures.

NATURE—DEEP JUNGLE

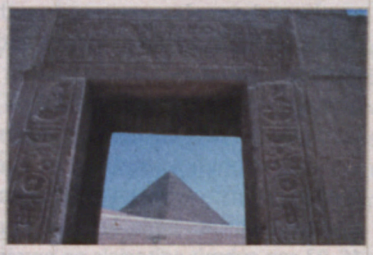
PBS, April 17 and 24 and May 1, 8 p.m., ET, check local listings.
This three-part series examines how sophisticated technology is transforming our understanding of the world's jungles, from Borneo to Brazil. It also profiles the new breed of explorers who risk their lives to study these wild regions. These men and women use every new tool available, from lasers to GPS and digital cameras, to track animals and their habitats. Some are amateur sleuths, such as Martin Nicholas, who spends his free time searching for a mysterious "chicken-eating" spider (and finds one). Others are professionals, like Roman Dial, a biologist by training who also resembles a gymnast. Dial crawls among the forest canopy in Borneo, using long lines of rope to hang between trees. Dial has translated his findings into the first-ever 3-D graphic map of a jungle, making a remarkable grid of images worthy of any computer game. More information on the series can be found at www.thirteen.org or www.pbs.org.

TIME MACHINE—BOONE AND CROCKETT: THE HUNTER HEROES

History Channel, April 18–19, 6 a.m., ET.
Pioneers Daniel Boone and Davey Crockett, who blazed early paths to the American West, are profiled in this two-part program. It can be taped and used in the classroom for two years with teaching materials available at www.historychannel.com/classroom.

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: MTV NEWS; BRETT VON BUDDENBROCK/GRANADA MEDIA GROUP; GARY L. FOREMAN; AND RICK FRIEDMAN/BLACKSTAR

INSIDE THE PYRAMIDS



Discovery Channel, April 21, 5 a.m., ET.
This hourlong program explores how and why pyramids were built around the world and examines the life of Sneferu, the first pyramid builder in Egypt. Can be taped and used in the classroom for one year. Teaching materials are available at www.discoveryschool.com.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC'S STRANGE DAYS ON PLANET EARTH

PBS, April 20 and 27, check local listings for times.
This four-part series is constructed as a high-tech detective story, with the fate of the planet at stake. The program follows scientists as they try to solve ecological mysteries. Segments include "Invaders," which looks at alien species of plants and animals that have invaded every continent; "The One Degree Factor," which explores the connection between energy use and the planet-wide transformation of climate that is occurring; "Predators," which looks at the links between deforestation and the depletion of natural predators in the functioning of ecosystems; and "Troubled Waters," which focuses on cutting-edge research to solve the worldwide problem of toxins in the water.

IN THE MIX—ETHICS: CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM

PBS, April 23–30, check local listings for times.
Is copying homework from a friend considered cheating? What about the Internet? Polls show that 80 percent of high school students admit to having cheated. In this episode of *In the Mix,* teens speak out frankly about the reasons they feel the need to cheat. They also raise questions about the definition of cheating and when it can be considered acceptable, if ever. Viewers then meet ninth-graders from a New Jersey high school who are required to participate in a series of courses on a variety of ethics topics. In a cheating and plagiarism workshop, the students wrestle with typical situations and come up with solutions. This program is designed to open classroom discussion and critical thinking about ethical behavior among students in grades 5–12.

LAUNCHING YOUNG READERS—BECOMING BILINGUAL

PBS in April, check local listings for dates and times.
For an educator who speaks only English, teaching students who speak another language can be a daunting prospect. Yet each year, teachers face larger numbers of students who don't speak English at home. Part of the Reading Rockets' *Launching Young Readers* series, "Becoming Bilingual" highlights successful strategies in teaching English-language learners to read by visiting schools in Texas, Virginia, California, Illinois, Washington, D.C., and Oregon.

On TV listings are provided by KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., www.kidsnet.org, and by Cable in the Classroom's Access Learning *magazine at www.ciconline.org.*

"Privatizing Social Security will hurt many NEA members, and continuation of unfair offsets that deny Social Security benefits will hurt many more. Join me in fighting Social Security privatization and eliminating offsets by giving to The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education."

NEA President, Reg Weaver

We can't gamble with our future

Contribute to The NEA Fund For Children & Public Education. Go to www.neafund.org.

DIVERSITY CALENDAR

APRIL

APRIL 10–16—NATIONAL LIBRARY WEEK
The American Library Association sponsors this week to encourage the use and support of all types of libraries. For more, see www.ala.org/pio/nlw.

APRIL 22—EARTH DAY
A day to remember our responsibility toward the environment and to commit to better stewardship of the Earth's resources in the upcoming year. For more, see www.earthday.net.

APRIL 23—BIRTHDAY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
The renowned English poet and playwright was born on this day 1564 and died on the same day in 1616.

APRIL 29—NATIONAL ARBOR DAY
The National Arbor Foundation sponsors this day to encourage people to plant and care for trees. For more, see www.arborday.org.

MAY

MAY 1–31—NATIONAL SIGHT-SAVING MONTH
Sponsored by Prevent Blindness America (www.preventblindness.org), this day promotes awareness of the importance of eye care, safety, and early detection of eye problems.

MAY 4—BIRTHDAY OF HORACE MANN
Born in 1796, Mann is considered the father of the American free public school system. He died in 1859.

MAY 5—CINCO DE MAYO
The anniversary of the 1862 Battle of Puebla, in which Mexico defeated the French army.

MAY 16—CELEBRATION OF BUDDHA'S BIRTHDAY
This founder of Buddhism lived from 563 to 480 B.C.

PHOTO: CHESTER HIGGINS JNR

Take Note

Fighting for Health Care Coverage

There are 45 million Americans without health coverage, including 8.5 million children. And the problem won't get better soon. Rising health care costs keep individuals, businesses, and state governments from purchasing health care coverage. We need to act now to reverse this trend. **Cover The Uninsured Week, May 1–8,** will feature kick-off events, health and enrollment fairs, seminars for small businesses, campus events, and interfaith activities across the country. Town hall meetings will also be held nationwide to discuss proposals for achieving affordable and stable health care coverage for all Americans. These efforts seek to inform our nation's leaders about policy proposals to expand health care coverage to the uninsured and make coverage more affordable. For updates on events in your area, and materials to plan events in your community, go to **www.covertheuninsuredweek.org.** The site also features resources on how to find, afford, and improve health care coverage; state guides to finding health care coverage; and suggestions for how individuals can help the uninsured.

Student Journalism Online

TEENSPEAK Today for the Leaders of Tomorrow, is a quarterly publication, written by teens for teens, intended to inspire young people to take an interest in the issues that confront our country and our world. TeenSpeak was established to help eradicate the apathy and complacency many youth feel about what happens in their communities, their country, and their world. TeenSpeak reporters learn fundamental skills in journalism. They interview prominent people in our world who lead by example. Through their articles, they inspire their peers to take an interest in topics that they might not otherwise be interested in learning about. TeenSpeak is growing an international forum with reporters as far away as Pakistan, India, Israel, China, and France. Students ages 16–23 can submit editorials on any issue for consideration for publication. For more information, you can e-mail teenspk@optonline.net. No downloads or attached files are accepted. For a free online subscription, sign up at www.teenspeaknews.com.

Time To Get Green

Inject some environmental education into your spring by participating in National Environmental Education Week, April 10–16. Sponsored by the National Environmental Education & Training Foundation (NEETF), the event will involve hundreds of thousands of K–12 educators and students around the country in a full week of educational preparation for Earth Day on April 22. National Environmental Education Week aims to bolster core environmental literacy in students with content-rich lessons on benchmarked environmental subjects, provide an educational dimension to Earth Day, and provide the professional environmental education community the opportunity to feature its accomplishments with educational leaders. Educators can find more information, as well as lesson plans, resources, and activity ideas at www.eeweek.org. Join NEA and other partner organizations in promoting environmental education in your classroom.

April 10-16, 2005
Join millions of teachers and students in a week of educational preparation for Earth Day
NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION WEEK
2005
Sign up to participate!
www.EEweek.org

Lesson Plans from the U.S. Mint

The U.S. Mint offers the newest 50 State Quarters Program lesson plans on its Web site, located at www.usmint.gov/kids. The plans, which can be downloaded for free, feature the California, Minnesota, Kansas, Oregon, and West Virginia commemorative quarter-dollar coins to be released this year. The lesson plans were created and reviewed by teachers to meet national curricular standards and are appropriate for grades K–12.

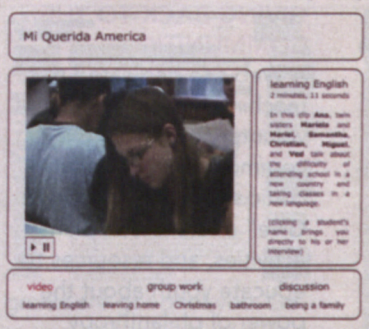
Exploring Africa and Its Cultures

This summer a two-person team will embark on a two-year-long, overland African expedition through 35 countries as part of the Tire Tracks Project—and they're inviting students around the world to virtually join them. At the Tire Tracks Web site, www.tiretracks.org, students and teachers will be able to access interactive, multi-media content about Africa and its people sent from the explorers that reinforces concepts taught in social studies, science, technology, and reflective writing courses. The team hopes to offer a fresh and balanced view of Africa, providing students with a new perspective on the continent. Students will also be able to participate in monthly and semester-end projects with other classes and interact frequently with the Tire Tracks Explorers, in addition to exchanging questions and ideas with the estimated 1,000+ participating classrooms. To sign up or for more information, visit www.tiretracks.org.

Immigrants in America

Mi Querida America, an online video documentary that follows a group of immigrant teens through their first year of high school in New York City, can be used to facilitate an inclusive discussion

ILLUSTRATIONS: GETTYIMAGES



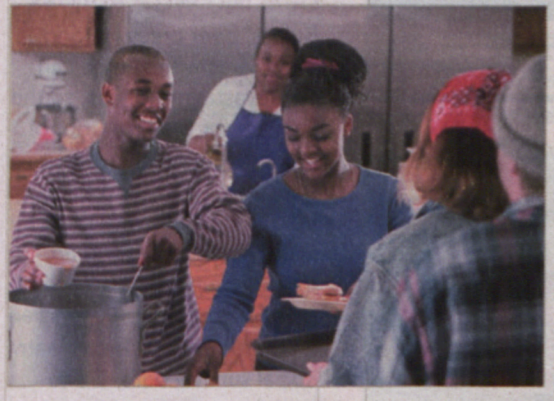
of immigration. Each of the short video segments on different topics can be viewed via the Internet and include suggested classroom activities including role-playing exercises and discussion questions. The program aims to use the subject of immigration as a vehicle to develop students' written and verbal communication skills as they respond to questions ranging from "Who was the first person in your family to come to the United States?" to "What does it take to be an American?" Check out Mi Querida America at www.digitaldocumentary.org/america/.

Arizona Mathematical Software

The University of Arizona has a wide variety of free, commercial, quality math software that can be used with students studying algebra, calculus, and differential equations. To access the software, go to http://math.arizona.edu/~www_main_2002/software/azmath.html.

Encouraging Service Learning

As part of the 17th Annual National Youth Service Day (NYSD), April 15–17, young people across America, with the help of millions of volunteers, will address important, unmet community needs through service-learning projects addressing literacy, hunger, public safety, and the environment. For more than 15 years, National Youth Service Day has brought together 28 million people in thousands of communities nationwide, mobilizing millions of America's youth to identify and address the needs of their communities through community service. For more information about National and Global Youth Service Day, including free planning materials and a curriculum guide, visit www.YSA.org.



Resources from the National Gallery of Art

Even if you missed National Gallery of Art's (NGA) special collection of Islamic masterpieces, it's not too late to learn more about it on the Web. NGA's site boasts several selections from the exhibit complete with detailed explanations. Discover how religion, politics, and world events affected art both ancient and modern. NGA also offers an instructional packet for teaching about Islamic art and culture including prints, slides, and a CD-ROM. It focuses on 20 examples of calligraphy, manuscript illumination, the decorative arts (textiles, metalwork, glass, ceramics), and architecture to address four general areas: arts for the mosque, Islamic science and learning, arts for the court, and exchange between East and West. Educators may request the packet for a nine-month loan period. For more on the exhibit, go to www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2004/islamic/index.htm. For more on the NGA loan program, go to www.nga.gov/ education/classroom/loanfinder/.

IS THE WAY YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A JOB OLD SCHOOL?

Learn some new moves with AGENT K-12, the powerful career service for teachers and administrators. It's online and in print, and it's from the publisher of *Education Week* and *Teacher Magazine*.

AGENT K-12 brings you the best ed jobs plus news that helps you manage your career – a powerful combination you can't get anywhere else. AGENT K-12 online makes it easy to search jobs without registering. Register for free and get automatic alerts when new jobs match your requirements.

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www.AgentK-12.org

CENTER PHOTO: GETTYIMAGES

On The Web

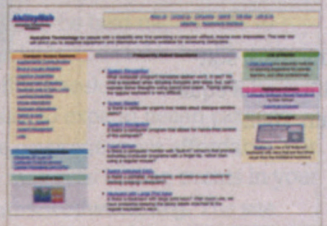
LAUGH IT UP

Prove to students that laughter and learning can coexist with the Museum of Humor's special site just for educators. Combining puppets with politics and satire with science,

the site is home to hundreds of free lesson plans designed to get students motivated. More memorable suggestions include a "Family Feud" review class with the Montagues and Capulets and the detailed dissection of a dill pickle. Go to www.museumofhumor.com/.

ABILITY HUB

This site boasts assistive technology FAQs and links for people with a disability who find operating a computer difficult. Links direct visitors to adaptive equipment and alternative methods available for accessing computers. Go to www.abilityhub.com/.

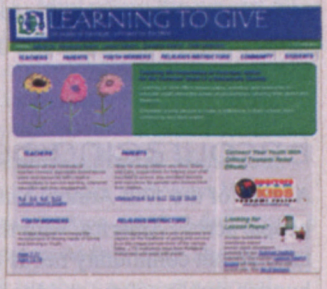


TRAVELS WITH LEWIS & CLARK

The Missouri Historical Society's "Lewis & Clark The National Bicentennial Exhibition" is available online along with an accompanying, multi-disciplinary curriculum. The exhibition takes a long look at the cultural landscape encountered by Lewis and Clark, examining not only their experiences, but also asking "What did the expedition look like to American Indian eyes?" Designed for grades 4–12, the curriculum is divided into units that follow the major thematic sections of the exhibition. These themes tell the story of the expedition through an approach that encourages students to examine multiple perspectives and use a variety of historical sources. To access the exhibit and educator materials, visit www.lewisandclarkexhibit.org/.

GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

A Web site dedicated to teaching the importance of voluntary action for the common good in a democratic society, "Learning to Give" offers lesson plans, activities, and resources to educate youth about the power of philanthropy (sharing time, talent and treasure). Educators can also volunteer to test new curricula in their classrooms at www.learningtogive.org.



DEALING WITH BULLIES

Bullies, peer pressure, and arguments with friends can be devastating to kids, so the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention launched a site, BAM! Body and Mind, to help them cope with these sticky situations. Using an interactive approach, such as a bully roundup game and an animated quiz, kids can learn social survival skills. Go to www.bam.gov.

FUNDING HELP

If you're new at writing grant proposals, "Show Me the Money: Tips & Resources for Successful Grant Writing" might help. The site offers practical tips on finding and getting grants, as well as a link to a grant match rubric to help you determine which

What's Up at HIN

NEA HIN

BREATHE EASIER AT HOME, SCHOOL, AND AT PLAY

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) studies show that indoor levels of pollutants may be two to five times higher than outdoor levels. To help improve indoor air quality, the Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics (AANMA) worked with EPA to develop the Indoor AIRepair at Home, School, and Play (HSP) program. HSP takes school personnel on self-guided building inspections and provides low- and no-cost solutions to common indoor air quality problems. Order your free kit today by calling 800-878-4403.

HELPING STUDENTS WITH DIABETES SUCCEED

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic diseases in school-age children, affecting about 206,000 young people in 2002. The National Diabetes Education Program offers a new publication, *Helping the Student with Diabetes Succeed: A Guide for School Personnel.* Part of the Diabetes in School Initiative, jointly sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the guide includes practices for schools to follow to effectively help students manage diabetes in a safe learning environment. For copies, call 800-438-5383 or go to www.ndep.nih.gov/resources/school.htm.

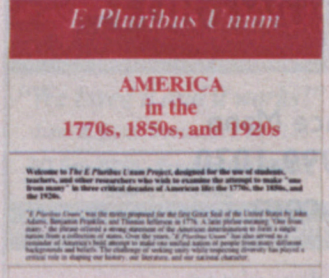
SCHOOL FACILITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT—FROM THE ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) recently published *Schoolhouse in the Red,* which focuses on improving children's health by improving the school facility environment. Although written for school administrators, it has broader applicability. The book includes a discussion about the link between asthma and poor indoor air quality in schools and compares the costs associated with deteriorating buildings. Copies are available for $12 each by contacting Ericka Turner at eturner@aasa.org.

grants are good for you. Go to www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev/profdev039.shtml.

ONE FROM MANY

You've probably heard the phrase "E Pluribus Unum," but do you know its translation? The Latin term, meaning "one from many," lies at the core of American democracy. This site examines three decades of American history—1770s, 1850s, and 1920s—that tested the nation's ability to remain united despite dividing forces. Primary documents such as speech transcripts, diaries, and trial testimonies offer access to some tumultuous times in our past. Designed with teachers in mind, the site provides lesson plans for each era. Go to www.assumption.edu/ahc.



VOICE FROM THE PAST

Step into the life and times of early American Elizabeth Murray with an online collection of her personal belongings. Complete with maps, portraits, and letters, Murray's possessions provide a firsthand account of the American Revolution. Catering to educators of all levels, the site supplies grade-specific materials, assignments, and interactive

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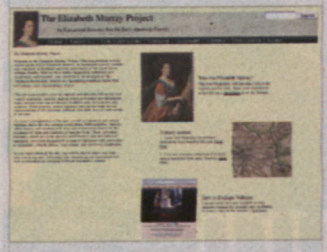
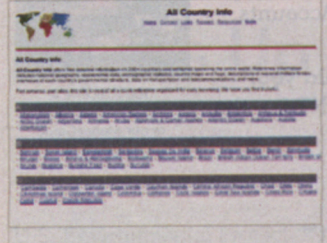
exercises regarding this fascinating, but largely forgotten, figure. Go to http://back.acs.csulb.edu:8080/emurray/.



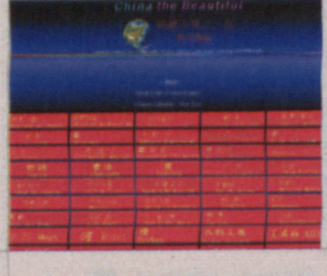
QUICK FACTS ON COUNTRIES

Information on more than 200 countries and territories can be found at this site. National geography, economic data, demographic statistics, country maps and flags, descriptions of national military forces, overviews of each country's governmental structure, and data on transportation and telecommunications can all be found at this part-almanac, part-atlas site. Go to www.allcountryinfo.org/.



CHINA THE BEAUTIFUL

This virtual museum offers rich media on subjects such as the Beijing Opera, calligraphy, dragons, emperors, New Year, and Zen Buddhism. Online tools include maps, discussion boards, dictionaries, flash cards, and tips for learning Chinese. Go to www.chinapage.org/china.html.



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Get Real

Showing students what you—and they—can do makes learning relevant.

BY DAVID PEINS

EVERY TEACHER I HAVE EVER MET knows—and hates—the phrase, "Those who can, do, and those who can't, teach." It's not true: Teachers can do. And our students need to know that. Kids are uneducated, but they are not dumb. They need a reason to learn—especially those who aren't academically motivated and just want to get on with their lives. So we need to show the relevance of what we teach by applying what we "can do" in our classrooms in a way that involves the world outside.

How I do it

Every year, I select final projects for my electronics students that require them to synthesize and apply what they have learned—real-world, cutting-edge projects.

I started the Central Jersey Amateur Robotics Club where robot builders from local universities, engineers, and hobbyists work with my students every month. For our annual Robot Madness Day, students and professionals work together in competition to build robots that can overcome challenges. The students learn relevant job skills, presentation and social skills, and can find opportunities for internships.

I also started a manufacturing company that supplies robots free to my class. That took considerable effort and I do not recommend it for everyone, but it has kept me current in my field.

How you can do it

I am certainly not unique. The English department at my high school requires students to interact with people outside of school to complete a personal quest assignment. Students commit to accomplishing something they have wanted to do but thought was out of their reach. They research and plan their quest and meet the people that can make their dreams come true. In the process, they gain a lot of practical writing experience.

History classes can interview residents who took part in historical events and compare their versions to the text. Foreign language students can interpret for or teach English to non-English-speaking people in the community.

Science and mathematics abound with opportunities to mesh with the local community: Collect environmental data and analyze and present it to the community. Ask local companies and universities for help with projects. They get a chance to look over your students and you have another resource in your classroom.

David Peins' students learn reading, 'riting, and robot-making.

Does it work?

There was a student some years ago who did not see the relevance of school learning. He worked on car motors, made things out of wood, and played his guitar. Today, we call kids like him "disaffected," but back then, they just called them "lazy" or "out of step." The student's guidance counselor suggested that he drop out of school and become a gas station mechanic.

And most of his other teachers agreed—except for one history teacher who saw that what this kid was doing was relevant to him and that he was learning. Mr. Morgan allowed this student to do alternate assignments that related to his interests. At 19, by some miracle that New York calls "social promotion," he was finally awarded a diploma.

So what happened to this pain in the collective necks of his teachers? Well, he—aka me—grew up to become a teacher himself, and I've told you a few of the other things I am doing now.

As an educator, I am determined to show the application first, the method second. I do have suggestions for my students about unwise choices, I present many alternate paths, and I ask what students are interested in. Robotics is probably the best context for teaching electronics I have found, but not the only one.

So ask yourself, what can I do best in my content area? What experiences have I had that I can use to bring reality to my subject? Whom do I know, or whom can I contact, who is using the skills that I teach?

We became teachers to make the world a better place and we cannot do it alone. Involve your community, parents, and future employers. Most of all, listen to your kids!

"History classes can interview residents who took part in historical events....Foreign language students can interpret for or teach English to non-English-speaking people."

David Peins teaches electronics at Manalapan High School, Englishtown, New Jersey. Visit www.robodyssey.com and www.cjrobotics.org for more.

PHOTO: RACHELLE OMENSON

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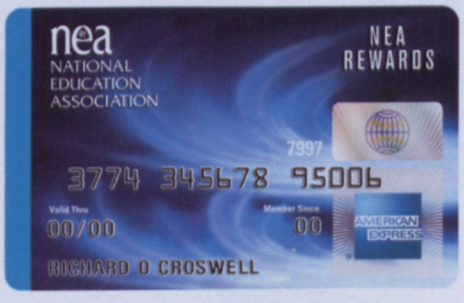

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